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Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati and Fernando de Rojas:

Celestina and the World of the Go-Between

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Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati and Fernando de Rojas:

Celestina and the World of the Go-Between

by

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Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

August 2011

Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati and Fernando de Rojas:

Celestina and the World of the Go-Between

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2011

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Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, one of the great Jewish poets and scholars of the Italian Renaissance, first translated the Spanish work *Celestina* (1499) by Fernando de Rojas into Hebrew in 1507. At present, only Tsarfati's introductory poem to his translation remains. This study seeks to answer the questions: What may have been Tsarfati's motivation to translate *Celestina* into Hebrew so soon after its Spanish composition? How might a Jewish audience in Rojas's day have understood his work? In response to these questions, this study will primarily concern itself with the similarities between Rojas's and Tsarfati's historical situations and the literary interests that they expressed in their works, interests that could have drawn Tsarfati to translate Rojas's work. Close readings of sections of *Celestina*, as well as an overview of Tsarfati's two hundred and thirty-poem corpus and close readings of several of these poems, make up the most important part of this study's analysis.

Through this analysis, I argue that both Rojas and Tsarfati stood as transitional figures during a period of literary change, which allowed them to explore and exhibit similar themes and interests in their works. Their works thus served as a type of "go-

between," moving their audiences from the attitudes and behaviors of one era into those of a new era. Additionally, and more importantly, both men found themselves at the nexus, or point of contact, between two cultures. Rojas – as a *converso* serving as a lawyer and leader of a Christian community – and Tsarfati – serving as a Jewish physician to the pope – were both in a position to feel the heavy pressures of the dominant culture and to communicate with their Jewish culture in ways that subverted that pressure and power. Both Rojas and Tsarfati were fascinated with the power of language to conceal and reveal meaning and to exert influence. As men of their time, both saw romantic love as having true, intrinsic value, but at the same time used it as a metaphor for the false hope offered by the dominant culture.

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Introduction

According to his introduction to the work generally known as *Celestina*,[1] Fernando de Rojas first took pen to paper to create the Spanish masterpiece in the year 1499, near the close of the fifteenth century, in a fortnight of frenzied, around-the-clock writing during the spring break of his college studies.[2] Those Jews who had not been willing to convert to Christianity had been expelled by the Catholic Monarchs seven years earlier in order to prevent "great damage to the Christians [which] has resulted from and does result from the participation, conversation, and communication that they have had with the Jews, who try to always achieve by whatever ways and means possible to subvert and to draw away faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith and to separate them from it…"[3] By 1499 the Inquisition had already been active in Spain for almost

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[1] The title first given to the work was *Comedia de Calisto y Melibea*. This title was changed in later editions to *Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*. Much later, the work began to assume the name of its most prominent character, Celestina. This is the title by which it is most regularly known today, and is the title which will be used to refer to it in this study.

[2] "Asimismo pensarían que no quince días de unas vacaciones, mientra mis socios en sus tierras, en acabarlo me detuviese, como es lo cierto." M.ª José Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina* (Madrid: Biblioteca Hermes – Clásicos Castellanos, 1997), 52. The fifteen days of vacation would have referred to the April break for Easter. Stephen Gilman notes the irony of a work filled with so much death being written at a time when Christians were celebrating new life; Stephen Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas: The Intellectual and Social Landscape of La Celestina* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1972), 270.

In the same introduction, Rojas clearly states that he was not the author of the entire work, but that he found a manuscript by an anonymous author. He left the author's work intact as Act One, and then completed the story in the subsequent acts. Although some modern scholars have questioned this account, either seeing Rojas as the sole author, or seeing *Celestina* as the work of multiple authors who may or may not have included Rojas, the discussion of multiple authorship of *Celestina* lies outside of the scope of this study. However, whether or not Rojas actually wrote the majority of *Celestina* or not, he still claimed responsibility for it, in effect making the work his own. In this study, when I write of Rojas as the "author" of *Celestina*, I refer to him as the person to whom ownership of the work is subscribed, whether he wrote all or a portion of it. See note 97.

[3] "…el gran daño que a los cristianos se ha seguido y sigue de la participación, conversación, y comunicación que han tenido y tienen con los judíos; los cuales se prueba que procuran siempre, por

twenty years,[4] forcefully searching for any evidences of crypto-Judaism that had survived among the large population of Spanish *conversos* (the Spanish word for Jews and Muslims who converted to Christianity, and for their descendants).[5] Rojas was a product of this world of heightened suspicions and tensions. He also lived during a time when many educational circles were in a period of self-aware transition towards new ways of thinking about the world. He received his childhood education in the mode of medieval scholasticism, which encouraged rote learning in preparation for specific jobs[6] – doctor, theologian, and lawyer – but during his later education would likely have begun to be exposed, according to the general trends of his time, to Renaissance ideals such as an emphasis on the beauty of language and eloquent communication.[7]

Rojas's work *Celestina* was so rapidly popular that numerous editions were produced almost immediately[8] – the first edition was published in Burgos in 1499, with

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quantas vías más pueden, de subvertir y substraer de nuestra Santa Fe Católica á los fieles cristianos, y los apartan della…" *Novísima Recopilación de las Leyes de España* (Madrid, 1805), Libro XII, Título I, Ley III. English translation in David Raphael, ed., *The Expulsion 1492 Chronicles* (North Hollywood, CA: Carmi Press, 1992), 190.

[4] Benzion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: New York Review Books, 2001), 1079-80. The first fifty years of the Inquisition were the most focused on the Jews and were also the most violent. According to Henry Kamen, 91.6% of those judged in Valencia, and 99.3% of those judged in Barcelona between 1484 and 1505 were Jewish. Kamen estimates that approximately 2,000 Jews were executed between 1480 and 1530. See Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), 60.

[5] Other names for this group also exist: Marranos (the insulting name often used by Spaniards, which literally means "pigs," an animal that practicing Jews could not eat), New Christians (another term used by non-Jewish Spaniards, who often referred to themselves as Old Christians, since they did not need to convert), and *anusim*, the Hebrew word for forced converts. This study will only use the terms *converso* and New Christian.

[6] Craig W. Kallendorf, ed. *Humanist Educational Treatises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,2002), vii.

[7] Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains* (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 92-99.

[8] A brief review of the development of the text in these edition is given in chapter 2.

the second following in Toledo in 1500, the third in Seville in 1501, and the fourth in Salamanca in 1502.[9] By the end of the sixteenth century, at least thirty editions had been published,[10] with possibly as many as eighty.[11] *Celestina*'s popularity was not confined to Spain alone. Translations were produced in Italian (1505), Hebrew (1507), German (1520), English (1525), and French (1527) during the lifetime of the author. Others followed after his death – Flemish (1550) and Latin (1624). By the mid seventeenth century the work had received at least fifty-eight translations (one into Latin, one into Hebrew, four into German, four into English, five into Flemish, nineteen into Italian, and twenty-four into French).[12] The translation into Italian by Alfonso de Ordóñez, who was born in Spain but served in the papal courts at the same time as Rojas, was completed only six years after Rojas published the work,[13] and was almost immediately discovered and translated into Hebrew by Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, who would have personally known Ordóñez. Only the introduction to Tsarfati's translation exists today.[14] This made the Hebrew translation the second earliest rendering of *Celestina* into a foreign language,

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[9] For a comprehensive outline of the editions and their importance, see page 46, especially note 95.

[10] Haldas Petere and Herrera Petere, *Sommets de la littérature espagnole* (Lausanne: Editions rencontre, 1961), 14.

[11] This number according to Lesley B. Simpson, ed. *The Celestina* (Berkeley: University of California Press,1959), v. However, this number includes numerous editions whose existence is uncertain.

[12] Rafael E. Cornejo, "Bibliografía de *La Celestina*," in *La Celestina y su Contorno Social*, ed. Manuel Criado de Val (Barcelona: Borrás Ediciones, 1977), 564-68. See also Dwayne E. Carpenter, "A *Converso* Best-Seller: *Celestina* and her Foreign Offspring," in *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic world, 1391-1648*, ed. Benjamin R. Gampel (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 272.

[13] Kathleen V. Kish, ed. *An Edition of the First Italian Translation of the Celestina* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press,1973), iv-vii.

[14] See Mosheh David Cassuto, "mishirey yosef ben shemuel tsarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit," in *Jewish Studies in Memory of George A. Kohut* ed. Salo W. Baron and Alexander Marx (New York: The Alexander Kohut Memorial Foundation, 1935), 121-22; Dan Almagor, "hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," *Bamah* 127(1992): 19-20.

a surprising fact considering that Hebrew was not the primary spoken language of the Jews in Italy, who could have read the work in Italian.[15] Tsarfati, who served as a personal physician to the pope, also wrote more than two hundred and thirty poems in Hebrew, focusing on various topics such as romantic love; the praise of language, books, and printing; and the longing for redemption.

Although *Celestina* was given much less attention after 1650, with only five editions in Spanish and none in other languages between 1600 and 1900, the twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of popularity and attention, especially among Hispanists and literary scholars. From 1900 to the present, *Celestina* has had no less than fifty-five editions in Spanish (equal to a new edition every other year).[16] It has been translated into Arabic, Catalán, Croatian, Czech, Danish, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hungarian, Japanese, Polish, Romanian, and Russian, and into many of these languages – such as English, French and Italian – multiple times. Modern interest includes numerous and sometimes surprising adaptations of *Celestina* into operas, poems, theater, film, ballads, and even ballets.[17] Hebrew interest in *Celestina* has also revived in the twentieth century, with the first translation of the work into Modern Hebrew completed in 1962. In addition, the work has been adapted into plays for the Israeli theater at least five different times.[18]

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[15] Cecil Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1946), 201.

[16] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, v. Simpson (who gave the number of sixteenth-century editions as eighty) gives the number of editions by the middle of the twentieth century as one hundred and nineteen.

[17] Carpenter, "A *Converso* Best-Seller: *Celestina* and her Foreign Offspring," 272.

[18] Almagor, "hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," 23. The existence of published versions of all adaptations mentioned by Almagor in his paper could not be verified.

WORKING QUESTIONS AND THESIS

This study will focus on the role of Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati in first translating *Celestina* into Hebrew. It will seek to answer the questions: What may have motivated Tsarfati to translate *Celestina* into Hebrew so soon after its Spanish composition? What might explain the attraction of Hebrew audiences, beginning with Tsarfati himself, to the Spanish work *Celestina*? How might a Jewish audience in Rojas's day have understood this work? In response to these questions, this study will primarily concern itself with the similarities between Rojas's and Tsarfati's historical situations and the literary interests that they express in their works, interests that I posit could have drawn Tsarfati to translate Rojas's work.

I will argue that both Rojas and Tsarfati stood as transitional figures during a period of literary change, which allowed them to explore and exhibit similar themes and interests in their works. Their works thus served as a type of "go-between," moving their audiences from the attitudes and behaviors of one era into those of a new era.[19] Additionally, and more importantly, both men found themselves at the nexus, or point of contact, between two cultures. Rojas – as a *converso* serving as a lawyer and leader of a Christian community – and Tsarfati – serving as a Jewish physician to the pope – were both in a position to feel the heavy pressures of the dominant culture and to communicate

[19] A general outline of the attitudes, genres, and forms of medieval times as compared to the Renaissance can be found in A. D. Deyermond, *A Literary History of Spain: The Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 12-25. These will be discussed further below in this study, in the section reviewing whether *Celestina* should be considered a medieval or Renaissance work.

with their Jewish culture in ways that subverted that pressure and power.[20] Both Rojas and Tsarfati were fascinated with the power of language to conceal and reveal meaning and to exert influence. As men of their time, both saw romantic love as having true, intrinsic value, but at the same time used it as a metaphor for the false hope offered by the dominant culture.

In discussing the background and work of Rojas, this study will provide an analysis of *Celestina* that will add new insights to the enormous corpus of scholarly writings which are already in existence. Within this discussion, the analysis of the usage of "love" by both Rojas and Tsarfati will constitute one of the study's most important contributions. This study will also contribute to the field by providing new scholarship on Tsarfati's background and work, both of which have received very little scholarly attention. The significance of this study to modern scholarship is therefore two-fold: 1) a fuller understanding of and new insights into the Spanish masterpiece, *Celestina*, connected to the historical background of its author, Fernando de Rojas, a *converso*, and in light of its reception by Joseph Tsarfati, a Jew who lived at the same time as Rojas; 2) a scholarly analysis of the background and works of a heretofore little-known, yet masterful Jewish poet from Italy, Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, that will demonstrate the predominant themes of his works and his connection with *Celestina*. Besides the large circle of scholars interested in *Celestina*, this study will be of interest to other medieval literary scholars – whether of Spanish, Italian, Jewish, or general medieval literature.

[20] Tsarfati, who wrote in Hebrew, was writing to a Jewish audience. That Rojas, who wrote in Spanish, was also in part writing for a Jewish audience will be one of the arguments of this study.

Additionally, students of the Jewish situation in Spain and in Italy during the early Renaissance will find much that is applicable to their studies.

This study comprises five chapters, discussing Tsarfati's connection with *Celestina* and its interest for him. In the first chapter I will use historical documents to discuss Fernando de Rojas's background as a *converso* and as a literary figure of his time. Although this chapter will not provide much in the way of new scholarship, it will pull together existing studies on Rojas in a new way, providing my own analysis of them and what significance this scholarship may have when connecting the lives and works of Rojas and Tsarfati in order to compare and contrast them. This chapter will thus form an essential historical foundation for the remainder of the study. In it, I will argue that the events of Rojas's life and his personal behaviors fit the model an outsider or "other" seeking to carefully survive under the powerful influence of the dominant culture.

The second chapter will provide an analysis of Rojas's only work, *Celestina.* Since scholarly consensus confirms Rojas's *converso* identity, I will not seek to prove that identity through the text of *Celestina*, but will rather identify elements in the work that could have been motivated by a *converso* outlook. I will argue that, although Rojas gave more than sufficient clues of his subversive intent, he maintained a masterful subterfuge to the end, always leaving the reader with some doubt as to exactly what he was trying to say with his work. I will also argue that *Celestina* shows Rojas to be a transitionary figure from medieval literary forms and modes of thinking, to those of the Renaissance. To make these points I will use close readings of four specific areas of the

work, along with other relevant sections throughout the text. These arguments will allow Rojas and his work to be compared and contrasted with Tsarfati and his works in subsequent chapters.

In chapter three, I will introduce Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, the first translator of Rojas's work into Hebrew, and the only Hebrew translator of *Celestina* until the twentieth century. I will describe Tsarfati's historical niche in Italy, presenting the situation of the Jewish community in Italy and showing the cultural milieu from which Tsarfati's works arose. Tsarfati's own history will be tied in to the general history of litterateurs and of Jews in Italy. The last portion of the chapter will analyze two modern works that employ Tsarfati as a literary figure. The way in which modern authors viewed and portrayed Tsarfati will be connected with Tsarfati's historical background. As with Rojas, I will argue that Tsarfati served as a go-between for the Jewish and Christian communities where he lived, and that he was a transitionary figure between the middle Ages and the Renaissance. I will also demonstrate that modern Jewish authors have recognized these qualities in Tsarfati as well.

In chapter four, I will provide an overview of Tsarfati's *diwan*, covering more than two hundred and thirty poems. I will also provide close readings of several of these poems in order to see what themes and interests they reveal in Tsarfati. This chapter will show that, like Rojas, Tsarfati acted as a go-between – one of the titles used for *Celestina's* main character – for the two communities that exerted influence in his life: the dominant culture of the Christian religious regime, and his own Jewish people who

often found themselves under attack and deep influence from that regime. Tsarfati's interests, shown through his life background, and through his choices in literary creation, will also reveal him to stand as a go-between in time, still heavily influenced by earlier concepts and thought patterns, but also beginning to demonstrate views and forms that would later come to be associated with the Renaissance. These similarities with Rojas likely drew Tsarfati to translate *Celestina* at such an early date, and partially explain *Celestina*'s widespread popularity as well.

In the final chapter, chapter five, I will closely read Tsarfati's introduction to *Celestina*. A reading of this introductory poem will reinforce the concepts found in Tsarfati's other works, analyzed in chapter four. In his poem, Tsarfati reveals his motivation for translating the work, with multiple allusions that would only have been understood by his Hebrew audience. The themes developed in the preceding chapters – in particular the use of language to reveal and conceal and also the focus on illicit love as a symbol of the allure of a false religion – will be rounded out and concluded in this final chapter.

Throughout, this study will be guided by the view that the ideologies of the dominant institutions of an era are absorbed by that era's authors. Whether the authors accept or resist the ideology of the dominant culture, in the end they and their works – such as those of Rojas and Tsarfati – are still defined and circumscribed by it. This study will exhibit an awareness of the influence of the cultural knowledge and experience of the author's audience (or of the consumers, as modern-day authors and publishers would call

them). The author/composer has a certain story that he desires to tell. However, the reality of an audience that would either accept or reject the author's work constantly exerts influence on the creation and presentation of that work. Rojas and Tsarfati had audiences – or more accurately stated multiple, varying audiences with widely varying viewpoints and expectations – which would have been consistently in their minds. Thus they had to create works with which their audiences would be able to connect. The "horizon of expectations" of each audience had to be taken into account by the authors, who could not exceed that horizon by a great amount without losing the interest of the audience.[21] The reality of an audience for *Celestina* – that of the dominant Christian culture and that of the *converso* culture, both of which had differing expectations – and for the works of Tsarfati will be especially relevant.

In this study I will use a number of concepts of analysis from the literary theory of Michel Foucault,[22] who focused on the "discourse" of the dominant regime, and how the

[21] "Horizon of expectations" details the symbols, viewpoints, modes of storytelling, or other experiences of the audience that would allow them to be comfortable with a work. A work that is too foreign or that stretched too far beyond this horizon would be rejected by the audience as unintelligible or uninteresting. Every author has to balance this reality with the author's desire to create something new, and with the desire in their audiences to hear a new tale or be provided a new perspective. See Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

[22] See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); see also Louis McNay, *Foucault: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994). For Foucault, the dominant culture controls the ways in which sub-cultures view reality by constructing "discourses." The discourse contains words and symbols laden with values that support the superiority of the dominant culture. In the process of communicating within the framework or with the language of the dominant culture, sub-cultures are forced to use the words and symbols that reinforce their own inferiority. This discourse typically emphasizes the all-seeing, all-knowing power of the dominant culture, termed by Foucault as its "gaze." The gaze, symbolized by the prison warden's ubiquitous oversight of the prisoner in the "panopticon", detects subversive language and behavior on the one hand, or conformity to the values and norms of the dominant culture on the other. This detection then leads to rewards and to punishments,

surveillance or "gaze" of the dominant culture is appropriated by members of the subculture. In his discussion of the gaze, Foucault developed Jeremy Bentham's idea of the "panopticon," a theoretical prison building in which the prisoners believe they are under constant surveillance. Since the prisoners believe that they are always under surveillance, they police their own behaviors in order to avoid punishment. Thus, the belief or feeling of surveillance by the prisoners is just as powerful and effective as the actual surveillance would be, thereby reducing the need for constant surveillance. Although Foucault himself categorized discourse as a modern phenomenon made possible by Enlightenment thought, others have argued persuasively for using Foucauldian terms and concepts in analyses of pre-modern literature.[23] Since the dominant discourse analyzed in this study is that of the Catholic institution against the Jewish/*converso* other, the existence of the Inquisition as an enforcing agency of that culture makes Foucauldian concepts particularly applicable. As will be seen, the Inquisition operated almost as effectively as the theoretical panopticon, causing many members of Spanish society at the time to alter their behaviors because they believed its gaze to be ubiquitous.

Although I will employ Foucauldian principles such as "gaze" and "discourse" to describe the influence of Catholic power and dogma on the *converso* subculture, I also

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whether overt responses by authority figures or more subtle pressures exerted by the dominant society as a whole.

[23] See, in particular Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1978). See also ———, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Suzanne Conklin Akbari, *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* (London: Cornell University Press, 2009); David Townsend and Uppinder Mehan, ""Nation" and the Gaze at the Other in Eighth-Century Northumbria," *Comparative Literature* 53(2001): 1-26.

maintain that "counter-discourse" is possible, and that sub-cultures were able to resist the gaze of the dominant regime by developing coded language. I will argue that the *converso* sub-culture was able to exist within the framework of the dominant culture, while at the same time maintaining its own identity, by developing coded language that enabled subversive discourses. Although "Foucault's imagination of power is largely *with* rather than *against* it [power]," as noted by Edward Said,[24] literary critics since Foucault have shown that counter-discourse does exist.[25] Therefore, the ability of sub-cultures to create coded language allowed them to communicate with each other with some semblance of freedom notwithstanding the threat of surveillance and punishment by the dominant culture. While they did define themselves in relation to the dominant culture by Foucault, their coded language still allowed for strategies of resistance that reinforced their own subculture rather than the dominant culture. My study will describe this power through language and communication as one of the primary functions and abilities of a "go-between". I will show that Rojas and Tsarfati were able to skillfully communicate with their Jewish culture in ways that would have been considered subversive, notwithstanding the "gaze" of the Christian society in which they lived. These two authors, then, existed in a liminal state between the Christian and Jewish/*converso* cultures, able to communicate with both and to exist in both realities.

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[24] Edward Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," in *Foucault: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Couzens Hoy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 152.

[25] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge,1989); Townsend and Mehan, ""Nation" and the Gaze at the Other in Eighth-Century Northumbria," 1-26.

Chapter 1 – The Life and Background of Fernando de Rojas

Who was Fernando de Rojas and how did his cultural background affect his work *Celestina*? In this chapter I will the evidence provided by historical documents to reveal Rojas's identity as a *converso* and to argue that in his later life Fernando de Rojas gave the carefully crafted image of a Spanish landowner in order to avoid the negative pressures associated with a *converso* existence. This argument will prepare the way for my analysis of *Celestina* in chapter two, in which I show that many elements of that work can be attributed to a *converso* outlook, but that Rojas provided these hints with extreme caution.

ROJAS AS *CONVERSO*

Childhood

Until the turn of the twentieth century, Fernando de Rojas was known to modern critics by name only, as the author of the famed work *Celestina.* The details of his life and identity were completely unknown – as much of them continue to be. However, in 1902 Manuel Serrano y Sanz[26] published the first documents which provided further

[26] Manuel Serrano y Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas, autor de *La Celestina* y del impresor Juan de Lucena," *Revista de Archivos, Bibliotecas y Museos*, no. 6 (1902): 245-99. This article included an official history of the city of Talavera de la Reina, which provided some of the details which will be mentioned later in this study. It also included the Inquisition proceedings for Rojas's father-in-law, Alvaro de Montalban, in 1525, which additionally reviewed Alvaro's first trial before the Inquisition, in 1486. During the proceedings in 1525, Alvaro requested to have appointed "as his lawyer the Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, his son-in-law, who is a converso." (It is likely that Rojas's designation as a *converso* was added by the clerk since there is no logical reason why Alvaro would have included it. See Antonio Marquez, *Literatura e Inquisición en España 1478-1834* (Madrid: Taurus, 1980), 47.) The Inquisitor denied this request and stated that the lawyer had to be someone "without suspicion." In other words, Rojas was under suspicion of being a *converso* by the court of the Inquisition. See Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 263, 69. Other Inquisition papers will be mentioned below.

insight into Rojas's life. A portion of these documents included Inquisition papers which for the first time opened the possibility of Rojas's *converso* background.[27] Other documents, such as Rojas's last will and testament,[28] as well as other Inquisition

[27] Although Rojas's *converso* background has at this time mostly received scholarly consensus, it was at first hotly contended. Many Spanish scholars rejected the possibility that the author of one of the most revered creations in Spanish literature could have come from other than pure Spanish stock, seemingly not wanting to "lose" Rojas as one of their own. Many arguments have been offered against the evidence provided by the Inquisition papers that have been published. Some of the scholars (and their works) who most vehemently denied the possibility include: Otis H. Green, "The *Celestina* and the Inquisition," *Hispanic Review* 15(1947): 211-15; ———, "Additional Notes on the *Celestina* and the Inquisition," *Hispanic Review* 16(1948): 70-71; ———, "Ferndando de Rojas, Converso and Hidalgo," *Hispanic Review* 15(1947); Marcel Bataillon, *La Célestine selon Fernando de Rojas* (Paris: M. Didier, 1961); Leo Spitzer, "A New Book on the art of *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 25(1957): 1-25. (For additional works arguing against Rojas as a *converso*, see note 88.) For the most part, their arguments claim that evidence from Inquisition documents should not be accepted since literally anyone could have been accused simply in order to help the opponent win the case. It is certainly true that accusations of *converso* status, like claims of noble, pure blood, are extremely suspect in Inquisition documents. However, in the case of Rojas, this status is not stated only by those opposed to him, but is mentioned by the courts almost as a subject of common knowledge, and even by those who would have been friendly to him. Otis Green takes a different approach with his argument, scorning the belief that *Celestina* could have been written by a *converso*, since it was not banned by the Inquisition any more than other books of its time. However, Inquisition Indexes of banned books did not begin until 1551, 10 years after Rojas's death, so this argument, while enlightening for other reasons, would not seem to offer much help in the discussion on one side or the other. There are still those who continue to battle the evidence that Rojas was a *converso*, or that his creation should be seen as the creation of a *converso.* One such scholar sarcastically states his skepticism in this way, "Among the various explanations, it has become almost hackneyed to view the *Tragicomedia* in the function of its assumed Jewish aspects, to the point that one finds it, with monotonous insistence, as if we were dealing with an opinion already proven and indisputable." See Nicasio Salvador Miguel, "El presunto judaísmo de la Celestina," in *The Age of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1516: Literary Studies in Memory of Keith Whinnom*, ed. Alan Deyermond and Ian Macpherson (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1989), 162. Translation mine.

[28] Fernando del Valle Lersundi, "Testamento de Fernando de Rojas," *Revista de Filología Española* 16(1929): 367-88. Valle Lersundi is a descendant of Rojas and held many documents pertaining to Rojas in what is known as the Valle Lersundi archive. The "Testament" included an itemized list of all of Fernando de Rojas's possessions at the time of his death, including his personal library, which Gilman would later analyze in *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas* (see note 30). A number of interesting details, such as the amount of his wife's dowry, are contained in this document. Valle Lersundi also published other documents, such as property papers, letters from Rojas regarding his work as a lawyer, and others in another article four years earlier: ———, "Documentos referentes a Fernando de Rojas," *Revista de Filología Española* 12(1925): 385-96. None of these documents contributed information regarding Rojas's status as a *converso*. All information regarding his *converso* background came from Inquisition documents, such as those mentioned in the preceding and following notes.

documents,[29] were published by 1929. However, a comprehensive investigation of all known documents together was not undertaken until 1971, when Stephen Gilman published *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*.[30]

These documents reveal that Fernando de Rojas was born in or close to the year 1476,[31] in Puebla de Montalban[32] (a village about five miles from Toledo, and today a part of it). His parents had moved there from Toledo after their marriage. Rojas grew up in a society rife with suspicion of Judaizing *conversos.* ("Judaizing" is the term used for those Jews who were converts to Christianity, but sought to practice their former religion in secret). The Catholic Monarchs Ferdinand and Isabella had ascended the throne in 1469, about seven years before Rojas was born. In 1478, when Rojas was a four-year old,

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[29] Narciso de Esténaga, "Sobre el Bachiller Hernando de Rojas y Otros Varones Toledanos del Mismi Apellido," *Boletín de la Real Academia de Bellas Artes y Ciencias Históricas de Toledo* 4(1923): 78-91. The Inquisition document discussed in this study was not prepared until 1604, after Rojas's death, when some of his distant relatives tried to prove the nobility of their line. The investigation was made, and it was determined against their interests that they were related (among other problems) to the "Bachelor Rojas who composed Celestina" and who was the son of a man condemned as a Judaizer. For another relevant Inquisition document, see the list of those condemned as Judaizers in Toledo in 1497: Francisco Cantera Burgos and P. León Tello, *Judaizantes del arzobispado de Toledo habilitados por la Inquisición en 1495 y 1497* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 1969). This document possibly gives Rojas's mother as another subject of the Inquisition, along with the detail that her husband (Rojas's father, if the attribution is correct) had been burned at the stake. Also see Julio Cejador y Frauca, "El Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, Verdadero Autor de la 'Celestina': Documentos Decisivos," *Revista Crítica Hispano-Americana* 2: 85-86.

[30] Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*. In this work Gilman described in detail all documents in the Valle Lersundi archive that had any applicability to Rojas, along with a similar treatment of any pertinent Inquisition documents. Another important study done by Gilman, published six years prior to *The Spain*, delved further into the Inquisition document published by Esténaga (see note 28). Stephen Gilman and Ramón Gonzálvez, "The Family of Fernando de Rojas," *Romanische Forschungen* 78(1966): 1-35.

[31] For this date of birth, which is used by all scholars for Rojas, see Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, 207-09.

[32] This location may be called into question by the Inquisition document which states that his father was burned at the stake in Toledo. Rojas may have stated that he was born in Puebla de Montalban in order to distance himself from the events of Toledo and obscure his *converso* heritage. It is possible that the family moved to Puebla after this tragic event. At the very least, it is clear that Rojas moved back there after his education in Salamanca, married a girl from that village, and continued to visit it from time to time throughout his life.

they established the Inquisition in Spain, where it prevailed from 1480 onwards. During the first fifty years of its existence its judgments against Jewish converts were particularly numerous and violent.[33] In 1485, when Rojas was only nine, some of his family living in Toledo (Rojas's aunts, uncles, and cousins surnamed Franco) appear to have been permanently dishonored as Judaizers by the Toledo Inquisition.[34] The Inquisition was begun in Toledo in 1484, and provided a Period of Grace, during which those who had either been careless in their Christian devotions or purposeful in their secretive backsliding to Judaism could confess their errors and receive reconciliation.[35] Part of this confession included a denunciation of anyone else suspected of similar transgression. Once this Period of Grace terminated in 1485, those who had been accused and found guilty – such as the relatives of the young Rojas – were made subject to fines and public humiliation: they were led barefoot through Toledo under the gaze of their neighbors, wearing yellow robes and a conical hat, and were then forced to listen to a public sermon and partake of mass in front of gallows, after which they publicly recanted their sinful practices.

In 1486, the Inquisition entered Rojas's village. Although no one from Rojas's own family was immediately accused, an early captive of these procedures was a man named Alvaro de Montalban, who would later become Rojas's father-in-law. While it is

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[33] See note 4.

[34] Esténaga, "Sobre el Bachiller Hernando de Rojas," 82-84; Gilman and Gonzálvez, "The Family of Fernando de Rojas," 269-73.

[35] For a summary of the Inquisition in Toledo and surrounding areas, see H. C. Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 3:146-47. See also Amador de los Ríos, *Historia Social, Política y Religiosa de los Judíos de España* (Madrid: Impresa de Madrid, 1960), 689. For a description of standard Inquisition procedures, see Henry Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 55-63.

impossible to know how well-connected the Rojas and Montalban families were at the time, Fernando's life in the small community would have been impacted by the Inquisition. As will be discussed further below, Alvaro was accused and found guilty of observing certain Jewish rituals, and also of violating the Catholic fast of Lent.[36] At the same time as Alvaro's sentencing, his deceased parents were also found guilty of Judaizing. Their bodies were exhumed and burned.[37] This had the double benefit of not only allowing their souls to be saved from hellfire at the time of judgment (the fire having already been applied on earth), but also of allowing the Inquisition to confiscate their entire property as an appropriate fine for their transgressions.[38]

There is also strong evidence that Rojas's own father – who possibly moved his family to the village in order to escape the same fate that befell his relatives in Toledo – was found guilty by the Inquisition two years after its entrance into Puebla de Montalban. The same series of documents that reveal the fate of Rojas's Toledo relatives in 1485, also state that Fernando de Rojas was "a son of Hernando de Rojas, condemned as a Judaizer in '88."[39] According to these documents, Hernando de Rojas would have been

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[36] Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 267.

[37] Ibid.: 262.

[38] The only funds which the Inquisition received in order to maintain itself and pay its prosecutors was through the confiscation of the property of the accused. This, of course, created a significant conflict of interest, which was noted in a letter from a *converso* to Charles 1: "Your majesty must provide, before all else, that the expenses of the Holy Office do not come from the properties of the condemned, because if that is the case, if they do not burn they do not eat." Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 151.

[39] Esténaga, "Sobre el Bachiller Hernando de Rojas," 87. A brief discussion of the identity of Rojas's father, which is somewhat in doubt, shows the challenges of genealogy at the time of the Inquisition. In the Inquisition document sited above he is named as "Hernando de Rojas of Toledo." However, in all documents located in the Valle Lersundi archives, he is named as Garcí González Ponce de León. This name becomes especially prevalent in the papers taken from Rojas's grandson's *probanza de hidalguía* (the process whereby individuals were verified as nobles without *converso* blood through extensive

arrested and found guilty when his son was approximately twelve years old. Another document provides a cross reference, indicating that Hernando was burned at the stake in an *auto de fe*.[40] The same list that indicates Hernando's burning at the stake, also provides evidence that Rojas's mother, along with her "minor sons", was found guilty and received a fine in 1497. (Since the age of minority was under 25, Rojas, 21 at this point, would have still been a minor).[41] Along with these traumatic, defining, and memorable experiences must be added the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492,

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investigation of their line – since they could not receive their *hidalguía* if they were found to be a *converso*), which was initiated several decades after Rojas's death. However, the name of Garcí González also exists among Rojas's own papers. See Valle Lersundi, "Documentos referentes a Fernando de Rojas," 389-91. It appears that Rojas connected his lineage to a man from Puebla de Montalban without *converso* blood in order to escape the severe social crippling that would have been associated with his father's *converso* situation. This is confirmed in Esténaga's Inquisition papers, when they state, "The *fiscal* contends that he [Fernando de Rojas] was a son of Hernando de Rojas condemned as a *judaizante* in '88 and that from him descends the Licentiate Rojas… for whom they also contrived an Asturian great-grandfather." Esténaga, "Sobre el Bachiller Hernando de Rojas," 87. The mention in the Inquisition proceedings that the contrived great-grandfather (father of Fernando de Rojas) was from Asturias would have sarcastically emphasized the fictional ancestor, since at that time Asturias had become a suspect city of origin. *Conversos* were frequently known to claim Asturias (which is Basque country) as their home, since it was the portion of Spain that was most likely to truly be free of *converso* blood. Indeed, this type of claim became so common-place as to be used as a popular joke. See J. Caro Baroja, *Vidas mágicas e Inquisición*, 2 vols. (Madrid: Impresa de Madrid, 1967), 2:298-99. The question remains whether to believe the Rojas family in their claim of Garcí González Ponce de León from Asturias, or to believe the Inquisition documents. An evidence against the Rojas family's claim – and for identifying Hernando as Rojas's father -- is that the family also replaced Rojas's *converso* father-in-law Alvaro (a relationship that is verified in multiple sources and is almost indisputable) on the genealogical tree with a Christian non-*converso* – Dr. Juan Alvarez. See Valle Lersundi, "Documentos referentes a Fernando de Rojas," 392.

[40] There is some question whether this document actually refers to Rojas's father. See Cantera Burgos and Tello, *Judaizantes del arzobispado de Toledo habilitados por la Inquisición en 1495 y 1497*. In this list of those punished by the Inquisition in 1497 is found the mention of Leonor Alvarez, *wife of Hernando de Rojas who was burned at the stake*, who was fined along with her minor sons. As stated above, this reference would provide a second witness to the punishment of Rojas's father. Although Hernando de Rojas was not a common name, and therefore could reasonably be assumed to refer to Rojas's father, the difficulty lies in the name of his mother, which according to this statement would be the same as Rojas's wife. While this repetition of names would not be impossible – Leonor Alvarez was a very common name, and it is possible that the Montalban family named their daughter after Rojas's mother, a good family friend – it still leaves some doubt as to the identification. The location of Rojas's father in Toledo is another complication, which is discussed in note 32.

[41] For twenty-one still being referred to as a "minor," see John Edwards, *The Spain of the Catholic Monarchs, 1474-1520* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 65.

when Rojas was sixteen, a time of great loss, commotion, and despair for all of Spanish Jewry. Indeed, of all the turbulent history of the Jews in Spain, it is possible that Rojas lived his childhood during the most traumatic portion of it.

University Years

Rojas began his studies to become a jurist at the University of Salamanca in 1494, at age eighteen. Studies at the University of Salamanca were still performed in the manner of the High Middle Ages, following the precepts of Scholasticism, in which students were prepared for the pre-set vocations of doctor, lawyer, or theologian.[42] Scholastic studies for these three vocations focused on a determined list of works to be mastered, and an acquaintance with classical Greek and Arabic works of natural science, philosophy, and mathematics. In Salamanca, the study of law had been the most successful of the tracks, and thus its forms of study were the most deeply entrenched. Law students were expected to memorize, repeat, and explain the four Justinian codes – the Codex, the Digest or Pandects, the Institutes, and Novels.[43] This form of education would not likely have been new or surprising to Rojas, who had grown up in a village area, far from a university, signs which point to more traditional modes of life and education.[44]

[42] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 95.
[43]Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, 52.
[44] Ibid., 12-13.

However, in Salamanca, the literary values and viewpoints of the Italian Renaissance were beginning to take root.[45] The year of 1494, his first year at the university, was during the first generation of the printing press in Spain, and knowledge through printed books was beginning to spread through the area. This innovation created a significant upheaval in the educational process. Not only were more ideas available through the rapid and inexpensive reproduction of books, but studies that before this time had been mostly engaged in listening and repeating, were now more focused on reading. This reading included a new emphasis in the Renaissance on Greek and Latin literature that focused on literature, oratory, and history – a focus on language and communication rather than on "dry" science.[46] At the same time, this was a period of great navigational excitement as the Cape of Good Hope in Africa was rounded in the identification of a new route to India, and as America was reached by Columbus.

A Jewish scholar, astronomer, and cartographer, Rabbi Abraham Zaccuto, had assisted in these discoveries and taught at Salamanca before Rojas arrived.[47] The ability to participate in these innovations and new ways of thinking seems to have drawn many *conversos* to the university life. Salamanca was known as a gathering place for *converso* intellectuals, who would have joined together in college to discuss their challenges, their

[45] For a discussion of the problematic delineation between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, see note 99.
[46] Jerry Brotton, *The Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 97-99.
[47] Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1st ed., 2 vols., vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 106-07.

studies, and ways to navigate their futures.[48] The change for Rojas – transitioning from a provincial life full of obedience to his elders, to a life full of young, educated companions whose minds were alight with passion for new ideas and discoveries – would likely have spawned an enthusiasm and intellectual fervor that he had rarely experienced before. *Celestina'*s vibrancy can partially be understood when set against the backdrop of Rojas's university education in Salamanca.

During his eight years at Salamanca, 1494-1502, Rojas wrote *Celestina*, which was first published in 1499, when he was twenty-three. This first edition was published anonymously, a fact which is not surprising considering his *converso* background. However, books did not begin to become a strong subject of Inquisitorial interest until about fifty years later, when the first lists of banned books were produced (in 1551).[49] When this first edition did not meet with any protest or reprisal, Rojas re-published the book in 1500 with a letter containing an acrostic that provided his name. Later, in 1502, he published an expanded version of the work. (These changes and additions will be discussed further below.) During his time in Salamanca, Rojas was made a *bachiller*, allowing him to practice law after his graduation.

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[48] Caro Lynn, *A College Professor of the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 79. The relevant chapter in this book is chapter five, "The Circle at Salamanca," pp. 77-88; see also Moses A. Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 54.

[49] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 7; Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 114.

Post-University Years

In 1502, Rojas left Salamanca to return to his hometown of Puebla de Montalban. Within the next five years he married the *conversa* Leonor Alvarez, and received a large dowry of eighty thousand *marvedis*, which would have allowed him the beginning of a stable, middle-class life.[50] He moved to Talavera de la Reina and set up his law practice there. Over the next thirty-five years of his life, until his death in 1541,[51] the documents show that he purchased and maintained a vineyard just outside of Talavera, along with his property within the city. Rojas even served as Talavera's *alcalde* (mayor) for a short period of five weeks, although how the post was obtained and why it was lost so rapidly is not known.[52] He also purchased a property in Puebla de Montalban, which he still owned at his death, and which would have required him to visit his old village from time to time.[53] His wife gave birth to three children, beginning in 1507 – Juana, Juan, and Francisco – all of whom are mentioned in Rojas's last will and testament. Some of his descendants stayed in Talavera, but Francisco moved to Valladolid – Rojas's grandson eventually practicing law there like his grandfather. As far as can be ascertained, Rojas never again wrote any works of fiction. In other words, according to the historical documents from Rojas's own papers, and from the history of Talavera, Rojas lived the

[50] Valle Lersundi, "Testamento de Fernando de Rojas," 375. We learn of this significant dowry in his last will and testament. Rojas was able to return this entire amount back to his wife at his death, indicating that his existence in Talavera had allowed him to live with relative ease.
[51] Luis Careaga, *Investigaciones referentes a Fernando de Rojas en Talavera de la reina* (New York: Press of New York, 1939). This brief study describes Careaga's successful efforts to find Rojas's tomb.
[52] Valle Lersundi, "Documentos referentes a Fernando de Rojas," 389.
[53] Ibid.: 385.

life of a typical Spanish landowner, preserving wealth and consolidating influence and power in the rural area where he had chosen to establish himself.

Two important events during Rojas's time in Talavera may have disturbed the seemingly tranquil existence that he had built for himself, and would have reminded him – not that he would have been likely to forget – of the powerful arm of the Inquisition. As stated above, Rojas's own documents provide no hint of these disturbances. These events are only available to modern scholarship through the preservation of Inquisition documents; Rojas and his family could not access and eliminate the incriminating evidence.

First, in 1517, Rojas's friend Diego de Oropesa was brought up on charges of wearing a clean shirt on Saturdays and avoiding the eating of pork.[54] These offenses would have been clear signs of Judaizing to onlookers, who were rewarded monetarily by the Inquisition when they helped locate a backslider, and who were also rewarded societally as they strengthened their appearance as citizens loyal to the dominant culture.[55] Diego named Rojas as someone whom he knew very well, and who could testify in his behalf. Rojas did testify in Diego's behalf, but did so with such caution that

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[54] Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 251-52. Modern readers may find it humorous that wearing a clean shirt in sixteenth century Spain was such a conspicuous event in a man's life that it merited note in legal proceedings. However, it is reminiscent of an accusation brought against another distant relative of Rojas in Talavera – Bartolome Gallego – who was arrested, tortured, and sentenced to life imprisonment by the Inquisition, primarily because he had removed his shoes when entering church (a Muslim custom), rather than wear his muddy boots into the church, as was the Christian custom. ———, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 252-53. Incidentally, Gallego later escaped from prison, and the Inquisition had to be content with burning his image in effigy as punishment for his display of obsessive cleanliness.

[55] Hayyim Beinart, "'edim yehudim mita'am hatevi'ah beveyt din ha'inqvizitzyah," in *Pirqey Sefarad* (Jerusalem: Hotsa'at Me'agnes, 1997), 1:486-88.

his testimony may not have been very helpful. One can hear in Rojas's testimony the voice of a man who is forced to help a friend, but who is trying to escape any connections or implications that could later prove injurious to himself. Rojas was asked three questions: 1) Did he know that the accused lived as a faithful Catholic, going to Mass and keeping all holy days? 2) Did he know that the accused slaughtered and ate hogs at home, and that he also ate bacon, sausages, and other dishes of pork and rabbit forbidden to Jews? and 3) Did he know that the accused knelt with great devotion in church and whenever the Ave Maria was recited, showing the reverence of a true Catholic Christian? Rojas answered in the following non-committal ways, as recorded in the Inquisition documents:

> To the [first] question he answered that he considers him a good Christian and that he used to see him go to Mass and sermons, and that he has no more to say. To the [second] question, he answered that he does not know. To the [third] question, he answered that he believes [that Diego de Oropesa did so behave] but has not seen him do so.[56]

If Rojas had proclaimed Diego's innocence with too much vehemence, and Diego had later been found guilty, it would have called Rojas's own Christian identity into question. If he had perjured himself for the sake of his friend, he would have been immediately called before the Inquisition himself. Therefore Rojas allowed his responses to remain in the realm of an observer, not a participator – he "considers" him a good Christian, he "used to see" him go to church, and "he believes [he worships in a devout manner], but

[56] Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 251-52. Translation following that of Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, 469.

has not seen him do so." Rojas is speaking as a well-seasoned lawyer and an experienced *converso*, and is clearly seeking to remain disconnected as much as possible.

The second occurrence would have been much more personal and frightening for Rojas. His father-in-law, who had been charged almost forty years earlier with breaking Lent, was brought before the Inquisition again in 1525, at almost seventy-five years of age.[57] In this case he was charged with denying basic Christian doctrines. Specifically, two secret witnesses with whom he had been visiting for a few months in Madrid said that they had heard him deny the existence of a future world. According to the court documents, one witness said:

> After midday when they had eaten and passed time pleasurably and were returning to town, the present witness remarked: "You see how the pleasures of this world pass by…. Everything except gaining eternal life is foolish and illusory." At this the aforesaid Alvaro de Montalban replied saying: "Let me be well off down here, since I don't know if there is anything beyond."[58]

These words were stated in the presence of a priest, even though the witness claims that he tried to warn Alvaro off of his statement with a wink and a wave. But Alvaro ignored him, and repeated the statement again. The second witness confirmed this testimony, stating that Alvaro had said: "We can see the here and now; what lies beyond we cannot know." The same priest also charged that he had never once seen Alvaro at mass or confession during the time he was in Madrid, although Alvaro was known to be a regular attendee while at his home in Puebla.

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[57] Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 263-72.
[58] Ibid. For English translation, see Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, 81-83.

The significance of Alvaro's statements and transgressions in identifying traits of *conversos* will be explained below, but the importance of this trial for Rojas cannot be overstated. Although Alvaro initially refused to have any legal defense, after a few days in jail, with all of his property seized by the court, he changed his mind and named his son-in-law, "the Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, who is a *converso*,"[59] as his choice. The documents indicate that this is not a case of mistaken identity. When he had been arraigned earlier, he had identified himself by his family members, including his "son-in-law, the Bachiller Fernando de Rojas, who composed *Celestina*." Alvaro's request was denied by the Grand Inquisitor. The Inquisitorial clerk noted his ruling that Rojas was not an appropriate choice because the defense needed to be led by someone who was "without suspicion."[60] Rojas's identity as a *converso* was here taken as common knowledge. Even more importantly, Rojas himself had been brought to the attention of the Inquisition once again, in a close family connection that could lead the court to believe that he and his wife shared the viewpoints of his father-in-law. The situation was even more precarious given the strategies of the Inquisition, which included offering reduced fines if the accused could name other Judaizers.[61] Rojas and his family may have worried through numerous sleepless nights during the ordeal. In addition, the punishment

[59] See note 26 for an explanation of the statement, "who is a *converso*."

[60] All quotations regarding Rojas in this paragraph come from Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 245-65.

[61] These fines were considered "retribution." Different sizes of payments were required for different levels of retribution. A payment of one size would allow the accused to be released from prison. A payment of a still greater amount would allow the penitent to start wearing normal clothes again, instead of the garb of the recalcitrant; to ride a horse again; etc. See Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 416-18; See also Beinart, "'edim yehudim mita'am hatevi'ah beveyt din ha'inqvizitzyah," 1:485; Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 55-63.

of the accused entangled the family. At the time of Alvaro's reconciliation, he would have been forced to enter the church and attend Mass in the conical hat and yellow, penitential garb of the guilty. The family was required to sit with or behind the penitent, providing a clear, visual symbol of the dishonored ties that connected the guilty in a web of deceit with his relatives and close associates.[62] This public humiliation would have been a subject of gossip in the community for months or years. Indeed, twelve years later Alvaro's trial was still referred to at the trial of Diego de Pisa, a neighbor in Puebla.[63] The relative quiet in which Rojas attempted to live out his life in Talavera de la Reina was not without its fearful interruptions, as he was never able to escape completely his *converso* identity.

ROJAS AND *CONVERSO* EXISTENCE IN FIFTEENTH-SIXTEENTH CENTURY SPAIN

Identifying the common characteristics of *converso* existence in Spain must be done with great caution, but the task is essential to this study.[64] Understanding various types of Jewish responses to their *converso* status allows Rojas to be situated more readily in his own historical niche. More importantly, understanding these varied responses allows the scholar to interpret what impact the *converso* experience may have had on Rojas's *Celestina*.

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[62] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 418. See also the description in Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, 71-72.

[63] Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 289.

[64] For varying types of *conversos* in Spain, such as those mentioned in this paragraph, see Miguel Angel Ladro-Casoda, "yehudim va'anusim be'andalusiah, 1481-1508," in *Dor gerush sefarad*, ed. Yom Tov Asis and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Merkaz Shalman Shazar Letoldot Yisra'el, 1998), 122-38; see also Yosef Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), 121-30.

Rather than being a unified group, *converso*s were by definition frequently separated from their prior community and from each other. Each *converso* would have reacted to her or his situation as an individual, and the responses of two *converso*s to the same stimulus might have been completely opposite. Studies indicate that some *converso*s, although this type seem to have been rare, sought to sever ties completely with their past associations and beliefs, immersing themselves completely in an entirely new identity, moving to a new location, and abandoning their given name in favor of their baptismal name. Other *converso*s stayed where they had greater connections, support, and influence with their Jewish and *converso* neighbors, and appear to have maintained close relationships – as close as possible – with those who did not convert (at least before the expulsion while there were still non-Christian Jews in Spain), or with those who still identified closely with their Jewish background.[65]

Converso motivations for conversion and their subsequent religious behaviors were also varied. Some *converso*s converted because they came to admire Christianity and were convinced that it was superior to Judaism. Many others converted simply because it was expedient – the social advantages were sufficiently high to convince them of the need to change. Some converted with no intention to give anything but outward devotion to Christianity, while their hearts remained with their Jewish faith. Others tried to uproot their inward longings for their own belief and people, but later secretly returned to Judaism when their inner conflicts became too intense. On the other hand, some

[65] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The New Otherness: Marrano Dualities in the First Generation* (San Francisco: Swig Judaic Studies Program, University of San Francisco, 1999), 8-13.

*converso*s actively worked to persecute their former faith, either because they became convinced that it was false and evil, or often because doing so would show the dominant Catholic social structure that they were truly "members in good standing."[66] In a completely different situation would have been those *conversos* who were several generations removed from their ancestors' conversions, and did not feel any attachment one way or the other to Judaism. In the minds of these *conversos*, they were simply Spaniards. For all of these reasons, it is difficult and even impossible to speak of the *converso* experience as a whole.

Michel Foucault has written persuasively about the power of the "gaze" or surveillance that a dominant culture or ideology imposes on the subcultures over which it has power.[67] Although Foucault was writing specifically about prison settings, his description appears to closely fit the circumstances of late fifteenth century Spain, in which the Inquisition had such immense power to reward conformity or punish deviance

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[66] See Sander L. Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986). Gilman's study discusses a phenomenon which he sees as persisting throughout the history of the Jews: many Jews who left their Jewish community actually chose to persecute that community after their departure. This was particularly the case for many who converted to Christianity during the Middle Ages (although it was only one of the many instances which Gilman analyzed). After their conversion, some Jews would teach Hebrew and portions of Jewish sacred texts to the Christians for the specific purpose of helping Christians to "crack the code" of Jewish literature. Thus Jewish sacred writings such as the Talmud (most often in distorted or badly misinterpreted form) were used against the Jews by Christian emissaries during the centuries of forceful Christian conversions. Gilman analyzed reasons why Jews would have acted in this way. Some conclusions include: 1) that this was a way for them to identify and gain favor with the Christian hierarchy; 2) that convincing themselves of the "wrongness" of their former beliefs was important for them to feel justified in their break with their former community; 3) that the challenges and persecutions they had received as Jews were then lived out by them upon their former community when they were placed in a position of greater power (similar to a parent who was physically abused as a child acting out those experiences upon his own children); or 4) that the negative perceptions focused on them as Jews by the dominant society were deeply internalized by them, so that when they broke from their community they continued to act out those beliefs toward their former people.

[67] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 6-18.

from Catholic orthodoxy.[68] Neighbors and family members were rewarded and protected for successfully naming Judaizers. If two individuals were attempting to gain the same post, contract, or honor, a well-timed characterization of the competitor as a backsliding *converso* could secure success for the accuser, whether the accused actually had any Jewish blood or not.[69]

In addition, because *converso*s began to take jobs and honors which they had not been permitted to have as Jews, "Old Christians" began to look on the "New Christians" with resentment. The title of *converso* or New Christian was seen as synonymous with hypocrite or social climber, one who would stab his own people in the back in order to take that which was not rightfully his own. Because these New Christians were often energetic in seizing opportunities that were denied them before, whereas the Old Christians were often more apathetic and tended to feel entitled to the same privileges, the New Christians frequently had rapid success in education, church, vocation, and the acquisition of riches. Their money was often a target for their jealous neighbors, and

[68] Foucault's views concerning what he terms "Monarchial Punishment," in which those in power repress and control others through the use of brutal public displays of torture and execution, are almost a perfect fit for some of the actions of the Inquisition, particularly in its first fifty years.

[69] There are many excellent sources which describe the atmosphere in Spain for *conversos* (and also for Christian non-*conversos*, many of whom were accused of Jewish descent by those who desired to gain power over them). Those used for this study, and particularly for the information in this paragraph, include: Helen Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006); Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2000), 3-31; Miguel de la Pinta Llorente, *La Inquisición Española y los problemas de la cultura y la intolerancia*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Madrid: Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1953-58); Henry C. Lea, *Chapters from the Religious History of Spain Connected with the Inquisition* (Philadelphia: Lea Brothers, 1890). See especially pages 202-05. (Lea was the first scholar to publish Inquisition documents, amidst much oppostion, many of which are included in this work.); Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*; Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*; Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*; and Beinart, "'edim yehudim mita'am hatevi'ah beveyt din ha'inqvizitzyah."; Baroja, *Vidas mágicas e Inquisición*, 2:290-305.

certainly was a boon to the Inquisition, which provided payment from the property seized to both judges and even to those whose testimonies had been helpful. To be *converso*, whether backsliding or not, was a stigma, and was certainly a risk.[70] The possibility of being reported by any member of their society, whether Old or New Christian, would have caused the *conversos* to feel as if the surveillance of the Inquisition was ubiquitous. Many *converso*s therefore sought to create genealogies and lineages that proved their lack of Jewish ties. The joke came to exist that the louder the cry of nobility, and the stronger the efforts to root out *conversos*, the more certain it was that the one speaking or the one persecuting was a New Christian himself.[71] Using Foucault's theories, how does one survive in a prison environment? It is necessary for the prisoner to either 1) become an enforcer himself, assisting the dominant regime (although this puts him at risk with his own community), 2) to keep his head down and hope he doesn't get noticed, or 3) to outwardly conform but inwardly communicate with those from his own community in subversive ways.[72]

Yosef Yerushalmi[73] has identified several common characteristics of the *converso*, which have been further developed by Yirmiyahu Yovel.[74] As has been

[70] The Inquisition would not punish an individual for simply being a *converso*, but instead looked for evidence of Judaizing tendencies. However, there was prejudice against them, and over time certain posts and jobs were denied to *conversos*. Therefore great effort was expended by those who opposed them to show their Jewish ancestry, and by the *conversos* to show that they were "pure-blooded" Spaniards.

[71] Baroja, *Vidas mágicas e Inquisición*, 2:297; Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, 19-22.

[72] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28-31.

[73] Yerushalmi, *From Spanish Court to Italian Ghetto*, 121-30.

[74] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *The New Otherness*; ———, *The Other Within: Split Identity and Emerging Modernity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2009).

explained above, these characteristics must be offered tentatively, and should not be taken to describe all *conversos*, or even to describe any individual *converso* perfectly in all of his or her complexity. However, these general tendencies seem to properly characterize many of the *conversos* from Spain, or those who immigrated elsewhere after the expulsion, and to explain many of their actions, writings, and attitudes.

First, many *conversos* exhibited a profound sense of disillusionment with life and with the dominant social order of the time. [75] The Christian society of which they were a part had offered them promises of acceptance, of integration, and of great opportunity. There were few posts or opportunities to which New Christians were not at least theoretically eligible, especially early on in the history of conversions. In many cases, the preachers who had sought the conversion of the Jews had preached a message of love, inclusion, and inward peace that would come as they left their outdated Jewish beliefs behind.[76] They would become new creatures and would be accepted as such. This promise of acceptance and of positive change was strong for those who had been despised and persecuted for centuries, had been formally segregated into dank, uncomfortable ghettos, and had been forced to wear distinctive clothing to mark their unsavory religious connections.[77] However, after changing religions, the *conversos* found

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[75] This does not mean that the *converso* experience was the only cause of religious skepticism in that time. As will be seen below, religious doubt and questioning was a general characteristic of the burgeoning Renaissance. See Horst Baader, "¿Melancolía renacentista o melancolía judía?," in *Estudios hispánicos: homenaje a Archer Huntington*, ed. Lewis Hanke (Wellesley, MA: Wellesley College, 1952), 39-50. See also Romero, *The Subversive Tradition in Spanish Renaissance Writing*, (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2005), iv-vii; and Brotton, *The Renaissance: A Very Short Introduction*, 34-35.

[76] Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 12-13.

[77] Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 45-48.

a world that to a great degree deeply mistrusted them, was envious of any successes they gained, sought to prevent those successes, and maintained a stubborn insistence on the superiority of status that came with an "untainted" lineage. In short, the *conversos* discovered that the gospel of love and acceptance that had been preached to them was only an illusion.

Many of these same *conversos* would not have converted in the first place if they had not been disillusioned with their own religion.[78] According to the Christian ministers and friars to whose teachings the Jewish communities were forced to listen, evidence of the failings and shortcomings of Judaism could be seen in the state and status of the Jewish people for so many centuries.[79] As the reasoning went, if they truly had the favor of God then their position in relation to Christians would have been the exact reverse. After incessant exposure to preaching of this concept, many Jews became disgusted with their traditional faith, and saw its promises of and longings for redemption as a fool's hope. After converting to Christianity and discovering its promises also to be false, they were left with a deep distrust of any and all religious promises.[80] All that was left to them was to try to live life as comfortably and peacefully as possible, while ignoring any hope

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[78] For the corrosive effect of the Christian missionary effort on Jewish self-view, including forced preaching and debates, see Jonathan M. Elukin, *Living Together, Living Apart: Rethinking Jewish-Christian Relations in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 202-07; Benjamin R. Gampel, "Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia: *Convivencia* through the Eyes of Sephardic Jews," in *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in Medieval Spain*, ed. Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn Denise Dodds (New York: G. Braziller, 1992), 12-13; Jacob Neusner and Bruce Chilton, *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), xxiii-xxvi. For example, Benjamin Gampel estimates that the effect of the Disputation of Tortosa in 1414 was the conversion of between one third and one half of the Jewish population of that area.

[79] Neusner and Chilton, *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah*, 64-66.

[80] Yovel, *Marrano Dualities*, 16-19.

for spiritual, religious rewards. Others, in fact many, had abandoned their religion not for the spiritual promises of Christianity, but simply to save their lives and worldly possessions and to gain greater opportunities for physical survival and the acquisition of material security.[81] This type of attitude also contributed to deep religious skepticism.

This type of religious skepticism and of material focus on security is echoed by Alvaro de Montalban's statement: "Let me be well off down here, since I don't know if there is anything beyond," and "We can see the here and now; what lies beyond we cannot know." This statement betrayed both Jewish and Christian belief at the same time. A similar betrayal of both religions can also be seen in the accusations from Alvaro's 1486 trial. Alvaro was accused of observing certain Jewish rituals such as eating unleavened bread on Passover, keeping the festival of Sukkot, and purchasing only kosher food. Ironically, Alvaro was also accused of violating the Catholic fast of Lent by eating meat and cheese and drinking milk. The irony is found in the dual violation that this second transgression signified – Alvaro had not merely broken the Catholic law of Lent, but had also broken the Jewish injunction to not partake of milk products and meat at the same time. Thus not only Alvaro's words, but his actions revealed his religious skepticism.

[81] Rejection of deeply held religious beliefs, even if only outer rejection, in order to preserve social status or material possessions was capable of creating strong psychological repercussions of self-doubt, guilt, and self-hatred in those who saw themselves as betraying their former faith. These feelings could manifest themselves in different ways, such as a further mental and physical distancing from the former religion and those who espoused it, a drawing back to the religious community, or a deep sense of disillusionment with life in general. See Baader, "¿Melancolía renacentista o melancolía judía?," 42-45.

A second *converso* attribute that has been identified by Yovel is a life marked by masks, cloaks, and dissimulations.[82] Although the lives of converts to a new faith would at times be marked by holdover beliefs and traditions, many *conversos* learned to hide these types of behaviors almost completely in order to blend in with their new society. They learned to speak like the dominant culture, look like the dominant culture, and act like the dominant culture in order to hide their true connections to their traditional Jewish culture. Although their lives may have been marked by deep dissatisfaction and discontent, they learned to play the role that was provided them, at least while in public. This, of course, was necessitated by the methods and gaze of the Inquisition, as it sought to pry out of their lives evidences of backsliding. Some of those who were subjected to this type of gaze would learn to communicate with others in subversive, hidden ways, enabling them to retain their own sense of inner dignity and social connections, while at the same time surviving in a society that would strongly punish any clear evidences of rebellion.[83] Masks, cloaks, and dissimulations were necessary simply to survive – and for some, to prosper – within the dominant society of the time.[84]

This type of dissimulation can be seen from the records of Rojas's personal archives when compared to the Inquisition documents that have been unearthed in the last century. There is simply no evidence from Rojas's own records of any type of connection

[82] Yovel, *Marrano Dualities*, 56.
[83] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 28-31.
[84] Yirmiyahu Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 108.

to the *conversos.*[85] His existence as a landowner and lawyer in Talavera seems designed to avoid any suspicion, as will be discussed below.[86] In his own genealogy any unsavory ancestors are replaced by those who would not have occasioned any suspicion, such as the replacement of Alvaro de Montalban with Doctor Juan Alvarez, or the replacement of Rojas's father Hernando with Garcí González Ponce de León. Even Rojas's self-identification in his introduction to *Celestina* as being from Puebla de Montalban is suspect, especially when compared to the Inquisition documents stating that Hernando de Rojas "from Toledo," and possibly Rojas's mother as well, were both convicted while living in Toledo. If Hernando de Rojas was truly burned at the stake while still living in Toledo, it would have been almost impossible for Rojas to be born in Puebla de Montalban. If this was an invention, the purpose would be that the identification with a village would have indicated "Old Christian" to investigators, since Jews and *conversos* had typically gathered in large cities where their opportunities for advancement were greater, while those with pure Christian lineage had preferred to remain on their ancestral estates.[87] A connection with a large city such as Toledo would have suggested "*converso."* This suspicion of a dissimulation grows even stronger when considering the pure-blooded Asturian ancestry that Rojas and his descendants claimed.

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[85] The books that Rojas kept in his private library have even been analyzed, all of which confirm the same type of typical, Spanish life that is found in the rest of the documents describing Rojas's existence in Talaveras. See Hors Valbuena, "La biblioteca de Fernando de Rojas," *Revista de Filología Española* 17(1930): 183-89. See also Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, 430-56.

[86] See Gilman, *The Spain of Fernando de Rojas*, 397-430.

[87] Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 45. It is important to note that the situation of the Old Christians is more varied and nuanced than can be explored in this study. Many Old Christians were poor peasants who had no land of their own, and very little societal influence. These, too, would have mostly remained in the locations of their ancestors, but some would have been motivated to move in to the cities and towns that offered greater opportunities for economic improvement.

Despite all of the genealogical cleaning that Rojas attempted, he was unable to touch the evidence that lay hidden in the Inquisitorial documents. These documents reveal the masks and deceptions that were being played out in Rojas's apparently tranquil existence in Talaveras. They connect him to his *converso* ancestry, and reveal the inner identity of the man who worked so carefully to conceal it. While some scholars have correctly seen these Inquisition documents as suspect[88] – when one lives in a society of individuals wearing masks, it is difficult to know which identities represent reality – it is clear that the suspicion of his *converso* status was common knowledge at the time, notwithstanding all of his efforts to mask his identity.

A third *converso* attribute that Yovel has identified derives from the world of masks and subterfuge: a marked duality in the lives of many *conversos*, either in their public and private faces, or even in two very distinct phases of their lives.[89] As Yovel has described it:

> Sometimes the duality marking the life of the converso takes the form of a division between two radically different periods in the life of the person.

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[88] See the discussion about scholars who doubt Rojas's *converso* status in note 27. Doubt of his *converso* status is only possible if the evidence of the Inquisition documents is judged as inadequate. Others who have questioned these documents, and Rojas's Jewish identity, include: Juan Goytisolo, "La España de Fernando de Rojas," in *Disidencias* (Madrid: Seix Barral, 1977), 13-35; Miguel Marciales, *Sobre Problemas Rojanos y Celestinescos* (Mérida, Venezuela: Universidad de los Andes, 1983); Nicholas G. Round, "The Spain of Fernando de Rojas (review)," *Modern Language Review* 70(1975): 659-61; N. E. Schiell, "A Theological Interpretation of *La Celestina*" (University of St. Louis, 1966). Keith Whinnom, "The Spain of Fernando de Rojas (review)," *Hispanic Studies* 52(1975): 158-61. For a few examples of the many responses to these concerns, see: Stephen Gilman, "A Rejoinder to Leo Spitzer," *Hispanic Review* 25(1957): 112-21; Antonio Sánchez Serrona and María Remedios Prieto de la Yglesia, *Fernando de Rojas y La Celestina: el escritor y la literatura* (Barcelona: Impresa de Barcelona, 1991), 33-40; Peter N. Dunn, *Fernando de Rojas* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 3-8; Ya'akov Yisra'el Fink, "haselestinah umahberah hayehudi," in *Yahadut Tsarfat* (Paris: Mahberot, 1951), 168-86.

[89] Yovel, *Marrano Dualities*, 4-8; ———, *The Other Within*, 3-5. As can be seen from their titles, these books describe this phenomenon throughout.

> Noteworthy cases include converts and Marranos who returned to Judaism outside the Iberian peninsula. At times this Marrano duality took the form of opposite life periods – a man leading first the life of a distinguished doctor, scholar, or courtier in Iberian society, then transforming himself into a Jewish writer in the ghetto of Venice, into a Sabbatian messianic propagandist, or an Amsterdam rabbi…. The dual life of the Marrano shapes itself here as a dual career divided by time.[90]

Duality can be seen in the behavior of Alvaro de Montalban. In his home life in Puebla de Montalban, where he was well-known by everyone, he carefully displayed all outward evidences of sincere Christian behavior. However, when in the large city of Madrid, with its relative anonymity (making it in essence a more "private" space for Alvaro), he discarded these cautions, failing to attend any church or mass, and freely expressing his doubts about basic Christian doctrines.[91] A duality in time can be seen just as markedly in Rojas's life. Little is known of his childhood, although the evidence from Inquisition documents reveals it as a turbulent time when Rojas was coming to grips with the consequences of his status as a *converso*. During his time in Salamanca, Rojas would have continued to be connected to his *converso* colleagues.[92] The bold innovation, subversive language, and radical thought evidenced in *Celestina* – written during this time period of intellectual discovery and enthusiasm for Rojas – seem completely opposite to the straightforward existence that he would later lead in Talaveras. As a poor bachelor away from home, surrounded by others who were testing new intellectual waters and exploring the meaning of religious belief, Rojas's mind ranged freely. After his marriage and dowry provided him means to exist as a middle-class Spaniard, the

[90] Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 91.
[91] Sanz, "Noticias biográficas de Fernando de Rojas," 263-72.
[92] Lynn, *A College Professor of the Renaissance*, 79.

advantages of this type of intellectual curiosity would likely have decreased for Rojas. His life seems to have entered a phase which was the complete opposite. As has been mentioned, Rojas would never write again – at least not beyond the dry, legal documents necessary for his profession. No copies of his famous book *Celestina* were even mentioned in his last will and testament alongside the other books in his library.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER ONE

Not only do the historical documents support an identification of Fernando de Rojas as a *converso*, the events of his life and his personal behaviors also fit many of the characteristics described by Yovel. Rojas behaves as one who is seeking to carefully survive under the powerful gaze of the dominant culture. Similar attitudes can be seen in his only work, *Celestina*, as will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 – *Celestina*

In this chapter I will provide an analysis of Rojas's only work, *Celestina.* Since scholarly consensus confirms Rojas's *converso* identity, I will not seek to prove that identity through the text of *Celestina*, but will rather identify elements in the work that could have been motivated by a *converso* outlook. I will argue that, although Rojas gave more than sufficient clues of his subversive intent, he maintained a masterful subterfuge to the end, always leaving the reader with some doubt as to exactly what he was trying to say with his masterful work. In so doing, he was able to communicate effectively with both his *converso* and his Christian, non-*converso* audience. I will also argue that *Celestina* shows Rojas to be a transitionary figure from medieval literary forms and modes of thinking, to those of the Renaissance. To make these points I will use close readings of four specific areas of the work, along with other relevant sections throughout the text. These arguments will allow Rojas and his work to be compared and contrasted with Tsarfati and his works in subsequent chapters.

SYNOPSIS OF *CELESTINA*

Before analyzing the text of *Celestina* more closely, a brief synopsis of the work, along with its introductory material, is necessary. First, besides the introductory materials provided by Rojas, from beginning to end *Celestina* is consistently written as a dialogue among multiple characters. Thus, all information in *Celestina* is received from the viewpoints of these figures and any narrative voice must be deduced from their dialogues. Although these dialogues are much too lengthy to have made a successful play as they

stand, the work is formatted as a play, with arguments and summaries before each "auto", and the name of the character speaking preceding each dialogue.[93] This type of dialogue

[93] The genre of *Celestina* as a novel, a play, or something in between has been hotly debated. On the one hand are those scholars who see it as a play rather than a novel. According to their arguments, the work does not contain any type of narrator or narration as would be expected in a novel. Instead, it contains only dialogue between characters, with the names of the characters listed before their statements, and even scenes with opening arguments, as would be expected in a play. (However, there is some evidence that the arguments were added by the publisher, and not by Rojas. See Jack Himelblau, "The 'Argumentos' to *La Celestina*," *Romance Philology* 8(1954): 71-78.) This genre has importance to scholars, since its classification as a play would make it the first Spanish play, and indeed, the first modern play in the world, preceding even Shakespeare. For those who wish to classify the work as a play, see David G. Pattison, "The Theatricality of *Celestina*," in *The Medieval Mind: Hispanic Studies in Honour of Alan Deyermond*, ed. Ian Macpherson and Ralph Penny (London: Tamesis, 1997), 317-26; Almagor, "hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," 19-28; Juan Villegas, "La estructura dramática de *La Celestina*," *Boletín de la Real Academia Española* 54(1974): 439-78; Alan D. Deyermond, *A Literary History of Spain: The Middle Ages* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971), 384-87.

On the other hand, other scholars see it as the first modern novel, since it differs from other medieval works in the flow of the plot and the development of the characters. They find a similar style of action and development in early novels that postdate *Celestina.* These scholars state that the length of the dialogues in *Celestina* would never have allowed it to be performed as a play, and that Rojas could never have intended it as such. Indeed, all modern adaptations of the work into plays have been greatly altered from the original. For those scholars who have argued for *Celestina* as a novel, see Bonaventura C. Aribau, *Discurso preliminar sobre la primitiva novela española* (Madrid: Rivadeneyra, 1850); Marcelino Menéndez y Pelayo, *Orígenes de la novela* (Buenos Aires: Glem, 1943); Dorothy Sherman Severin, "Is *Celestina* the first modern novel?," *Revista de Estudios Hispánicos* 9(1982): 205-09.

Other scholars prefer to classify *Celestina* as a-generic, and emphasize that it resists classification. María Rosa de Lida Malkiel, for example, has demonstrated that while the work's focus on dialogue is stronger than any novel that would come after it, its dialogue is also much more unwieldy than the dramas that would follow it. These scholars have often referred to the work simply as a "novel in dialogue," following Gilman's lead, in order to retain the strength of both sides of the argument, although they are often challenged with the accusation that in trying to chart a middle ground, they have not furthered the discussion at all, but have instead lost the strength of both viewpoints. Scholars who have taken this approach include: María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *La originalidad artística de La Celestina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Universitaria de Buenos Aires, 1962); Otis H. Green, "The Artistic Originality of *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 33(1965): 15-31; Pierre Huegas, "*¿La Celestina,* novela dialogada?," in *Seis lecciones sobre la España de los siglos de oro: homenaje a Marcel Bataillon*, ed. Pedro M. Piñero Piñero Ramírez and Rogelio Reyes Cano (Seville: Impresa de Sevilla, 1981), 161-77; ———, "La técnica dramática de la Celetina," in *Homenaje a Ana María Barrenechea*, ed. L. Schwertz Lerner and I. Lerner (Madrid: Castalia, 1984), 281-91; Stephen Gilman, *The Art of La Celestina* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956); ———, *La Celestina, arte y estructura* (Madrid: Taurus, 1974); ———, "Diálogo y estilo en La Celestina," *Nueva Revista de Filología Hispánica* 7(1953): 470-74.

While this classification of the work as a novel or a play is not central to this study, a discussion of the heavy reliance on dialogue that has been analyzed by these scholars will be extremely important below. In short, while I do not support the view that Rojas designed his work to ever actually be performed, I do follow Gilman in averring that dialogue and the beauty of language in action was one of the central preoccupations of Rojas's creation. For a good review of the topics in this note, see Charles F. Fraker, *"Celestina": Genre and Rhetoric* (London: Tamesis Books, 1991).

gives *Celestina* an immediacy of action, a living quality that provides a noticeable vitality throughout. At the same time, the only character development in the work is revealed by what the various personalities actually say out loud (although the dialogues are full of asides and lengthy monologues that develop themes.) Rojas seems to be less concerned with how the characters develop throughout the play than with how they reveal themselves and betray their mutable, varying interests in each moment by what they say. In *Celestina*, language – as a means to effect change, to manipulate, and to gain power – is pre-eminent.

In the opening chapter or act of the work [Act 1, 65-98], Calisto openly proclaims his love to Melibea, who flatly rejects him as an uncouth young man without any chance of success in obtaining her love.[94] Melibea's rejection further fuels Calisto's obsession, which he reveals to his servant Sempronio upon returning to his home [Act 1, 66-77]. Sempronio advises Calisto to obtain the help of the old procuress Celestina. Celestina is a character of immense vitality and intelligence, who uses language to hide and reveal, to persuade and entangle, all according to her wishes. During much of the rest of the work she is like the spider at the center of a web of connections, manipulating and controlling the characters' interactions with each other. She cajoles; she threatens; she seduces; she flatters; she criticizes; she enflames; she invites; she condemns – all through her talented use of language. She knows and is known by almost everyone in town, where she runs an apothecary at her house, which in reality fronts for a brothel. During the work Celestina

[94] The Spanish edition that is used in this work is that by Mª José Sánchez-Cascado, ed. *La Celestina* (Madrid: Biblioteca Hermes – Clásicos Castellanos, 1997). The bracketed numbers in the synopsis are from this edition.

boasts of her successful practice in thirty-two occupations, all of which lead to the realization of physical love and intimacy. She sells perfumes to disguise body odor, potions to disguise bad breath, and dyes to disguise unattractive hair color. She claims to have restored with the needle the maidenheads of five thousand erstwhile virgins, so that they could receive reputable marriages. She sells love potions and sexual aids. She helps procure lovers for ardent young men and provides a location and secrecy for trysts between girls and her customers, who include monks, bishops, noblemen, and commoners. In her old age she has come on hard times, and her brothel is only a shade of its former glory, with only one prostitute kept in the house.

Celestina convinces the servant Sempronio to conspire with her in obtaining as much of the love-sick Calisto's money as possible [Act 1, 78-81]. Together they plan to fuel the fire of his love and provide him with just enough success to obtain successive payments, which Celestina promises to share with Sempronio. Another of Calisto's servants, Pármeno, is also involved in the conspiracy [Act 1, 81-98]. Pármeno is also the son of one of Celestina's former business partners and business competitors, Claudina. Although Pármeno initially mistrusts Celestina because of that association, she eventually persuades him to join with them, in the process converting him into a new customer of the love she sells by setting up a tryst between him and her servant/prostitute, Areusa [Act 7, 153-69]. Sempronio is already a patron of Celestina's establishment, where he has trysts with the prostitute Elicia.

In an important scene, Celestina is able to meet with Melibea's mother, Alisa [Act 4, 114-32]. She enters the house under the pretext of selling thread, which she has enchanted earlier to aid her quest. Although showing some initial distrust, Alisa's resistance almost magically disappears, whether through the power of Celestina's words or her thread, and she leaves her daughter alone and subject to the wiles of the procuress. Although Melibea initially rejects Celestina's mention of Calisto, after Celestina provides Melibea with the thread, with flattery, and with a motivation to pity the lovesick Calisto, Melibea allows herself to be persuaded to help him. She gives Celestina her belt to relay to Calisto, since Celestina has claimed that the belt is the only object that can cure the him. At a second secret meeting with Celestina, Melibea reveals that she is suddenly madly in love with Calisto, and is unable to stop thinking about him [Act 10, 192-201]. The eventual tryst between the two lovers is later successful – notwithstanding a brief, lukewarm resistance from Melibea – and the covert relationship between the two lovers begins [Act 14, 231-39].

After her initial success with Melibea, Celestina provides Calisto with the belt, and later gives him the report of Melibea's love. An elated Calisto provides Celestina with a golden chain as partial payment [Act 11, 202-07]. However, at this point Celestina makes a fatal mistake, and refuses to share her gains with her co-conspirators, Sempronio and Pármeno. They later find her at her home, and, upon her further resistance, they kill her [Act 12, 219-25]. Celestina cries out as she is being killed, gathering spectators and causing Sempronio and Pármeno to flee the scene. While jumping from her window they

are injured, allowing the police to catch and execute them. An additional five acts added by Rojas in 1502 further developed the actions of the servants' lovers, Elicia and Areusa, who plot revenge upon Calisto and Melibea for the deaths of their executed lovers [Acts 15-19, 240-70].

These extra five acts allow time for the relationship between Calisto and Melibea to develop. While the relationship in the first version ends tragically after only the first tryst, in the second version Calisto's death follows a month of daily meetings, and allows for the deep grief which Melibea will feel after his death. After this final tryst, Calisto is distracted as he is climbing down the wall leading from Melibea's garden, and falls to his death [Act 14, 268-70]. He is actually going to check on the commotion created by a disturbance between his new servants, who are standing watch, and the ruffians who have been hired by Elicia and Areusa to enact revenge. Thus the only unselfish act in which the reader sees Calisto engage during the entire work also leads to his premature death. Melibea is beside herself with grief, and after bemoaning her sorrow to her own servant, Lucrecia, she locks herself in the garden tower and throws herself out to die on the ground below [Act 20, 271-76]. At this point her father, Pleberio, who has entered in time to hear her confession of love for Calisto and witness her suicidal fall, is left to lament her loss at the false hands of "love." His lengthy lament concludes the work [Act 21, 277-82].

The first edition[95] of Rojas's work, published in 1499 in Burgos, did not contain any prefatory material besides these brief introductory words: "The Comedy [renamed Tragi-comedy in the 1502 edition] of Calisto and Melibea: which contains, along with its agreeable and sweet style, many philosophical maxims and necessary advice for young people, showing them the deceits hidden by servants and go-betweens."[96] In the 1500 edition, Rojas added a letter from the author to a friend in which he claims that the first act of the work was the exact reproduction of an anonymous work that he read and grew to love, and which he then amplified with his work in the rest of the acts [51-52].[97] He

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[95] There are several studies that give good overviews of the various editions of *Celestina* and discuss their importance and meaning in relation to the work overall. They include: Keith Whinnom, "The Relationship of the Early Editions of the *Celestina*," *Zeitschrift für Romanische Philologie* 82(1966): 22-40; Clara L. Penney, *The Book Called "Celestina"* (New York: Hispanic Society, 1954); Frederick J. Norton, *Printing in Spain: 1501-1520, With a Note on the Early Editions of the "Celestina"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 20-35; J. Homer Herriot, *Toward a Critical Edition of the "Celestina": A Filiation of Early Editions* (Madison: University Press, 1964), vii-xvi; Erna Berndt-Kelly, "Algunas observaciones sobre la edición de Zaragoza de 1507 de la Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea," in *La Celestina y su Contorno Social*, ed. Manuel Criado de Val (Barcelona: Borrás Ediciones, 1977), 7-28; ———, "Elenco de ejemplares de ediciones tempranas del texto original y de traducciones de la obra de Fernando de Rojas en Canadá, Estados Unidos, y Puerto Rico," *Celestinesca* 12(1988); Charles Faulhaber, "The Heredia-Zabálburu copy of the Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea 'Sevilla 1502' [i.e., Rome: Marcellus silber, ca. 1516]," *Celestinesca* 16(1992): 25-34.

[96] "La Comedia [Tragicomedia] de Calisto y Melibea. Lo cual contiene demás de su agradable y dulce estilo muchas sentencias filosofales y avisos muy necesarios para mancebos, mostrándoles los engaños que están encerrados en sirvientes y alcahuetes." Sánchez-Cascado, ed. *La Celestina*, 49. Translation mine.

[97] Rojas states that, reading the anonymous work three or four times, he desired to read it more and more. This work found by Rojas became the inspiration and foundation for all of *Celestina*. Much scholarly attention has been paid to whether Rojas himself was actually the author of the first chapter, as was mentioned in note 2, employing the myth of an anonymous author in order to further dissimulate his own responsibility for *Celestina* or draw his audience further away from analyzing Rojas's beliefs as manifested in the work. Today scholarly consensus for the most part confirms Rojas's statement, and sees evidence in word choice and style that Rojas was not the author of chapter 1. Although it is necessary here to acknowledge the existence of a second author for *Celestina*, the argument does not have much importance for this study. Whether or not Rojas wrote the first chapter or not, he was drawn to the issues that the anonymous work explored and the style of discourse he found expressed within it. The themes that are developed by the anonymous author became the themes of Rojas, and he continued to develop them throughout his work. Two further points are of note with regards to this matter. First, some scholars have argued for Rodrigo Cota as the author of the first chapter of the work, which would mean that this chapter was also of *converso* authorship. (Others have made a case for Juan de Mena as the author, while most state

also again praises the beautiful language and style of the previous work, and that of his own, but warns that the reader should not be caught up in the beauty of the language or the story of love, since the primary purpose of the work is to warn the reader against the trickery of servants and procuresses, and against the reprobate nature of illicit love. To this edition he also added several rhyming verses, again urging the reader to look beyond the captivating story of love in order to find a moral message – a warning against the dangers of love and a way to escape those dangers [53-57]. These verses contain an acrostic revealing for the first time Rojas's name: "*El bachjller Fernando de Royas acabó la comedia de Calysto y Melybea y fve nascjdo en la Pvebla de Montalvan*."[98] (The jurist Fernando de Rojas completed the comedy of Calisto and Melibea and was born in the Puebla de Montalban.) Also in 1502 Rojas added a prologue which differs markedly in tone from the previous sections [58-62]. It claims that the reality of life can be summed up simply as a battle or struggle for dominance – nature against itself and against living creatures, one beast over another, and men among themselves. The theme of this

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that it is impossible to ascertain.) Second, in his letter to a friend Rojas clearly states that it was the sweet language and clever sayings that attracted him to the chapter, which would continue to be one of his central preoccupations in completing the work. Important studies regarding the authorship of chapter 1 of *Celestina* include: Ruth Davis, *New Data on the Authorship of Act I of the "Comedia de Calisto y Melibea"* (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa, 1928); Manuel Criado de Val, "Indice Verbal de La Celestina," *Revista de Filología Española* 64(1955): 41-49; Fernando Cantalapiedra Erostrarbe, *Lectura Semiótico Formal de "La Celestina"* (Kassel: Edition Reichenburger, 1986); F. González Ollé, "El problema de la autoría de "La Celestina"," *Hispanic Review* 31(1963): 153-59; J. Homer Herriot, "Notes on Selectivity of Lanugage in *La Celestina*," *Hispanic Review* 37(1968): 77-101; A. Krause, "Deciphering the epistle-preface to the Comedia de Calisto y Melibea," *Romanic Review* 44(1953): 89-101; Stephen Gilman, "Fernando de Rojas as Author," *Revista de Filosofía* 86(1964): 255-90; Martín de Riquer, "Fernando de Rojas y el primer acto de La Celestina," *Revista de Filología Española* 41(1957): 373-95.

[98] Sánchez-Cascado, ed. *La Celestina*, 53-57. Translation mine.

prologue seems to reverse the moralistic advice of the preceding sections and will be analyzed more closely later.

CELESTINA AND ROJAS AS "GO-BETWEENS" FROM SCHOLASTICISM/MIDDLE AGES TO HUMANISM/RENAISSANCE

If Rojas was indeed raised in the Puebla de Montalban, as he asserts in his introduction, then his village surroundings and upbringing would have still been centered on medieval values and thought patterns,[99] which would have formed his understanding of the way the world was. However, as he was exposed to new ideas during his college years, the expanding of his intellectual horizons would likely have led to great mental excitement.[100] The writing of *Celestina* can be viewed in this environment. Medieval modes of communication were what had made Rojas who he was; they were the "language" with which he naturally spoke, thought, and acted. But he would have been

[99] Although in this study I will discuss differences between the so-called Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the changes from one era to another are not as consistent or as clear-cut as they may at times seem from a distance. Indeed, culture and thought patterns are constantly in flux, so to delineate one point of time in which changes became definite, with specific names for the two "eras" on each side of the line, can be somewhat misleading. However, although exceptions to the general rules can always be found, scholars have been able to identify several important concepts that shifted around the time that is discussed in this paper. Additionally, those living during this time frame identified it as a time of change, in which new ideas, discoveries, and ways of thinking were tried out and adopted. I use the titles "Middle Ages" and "Renaissance" in this study simply because they are well-known and long-accepted names that provide a frame of reference for discussing some of the significant changes of which those of that time were aware and of which they often desired to be a part.

As an added caution, it is important for modern scholars to not adopt a developmental approach to the Middle Ages as inferior, with innovations that led to current modes of thought being seen as superior. Of course, even the name "Middle Ages" implies something "in between" and less important. In this study, when I use the word "exciting" for the developments for the Renaissance, I do not mean to imply that the developments of the Renaissance were always superior to that which preceded them. Rather, I am trying to capture the general feeling of enthusiasm and discovery that pervaded much of Europe at the time.

[100] Cecil Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1959), 12.

exposed to changing forms and ideals and these may have been the concepts which fueled his imagination and spurred his creativity.

Thus Rojas would have become an unwitting "go-between" for the two eras (as they have been defined in modern times), capable of and likely to communicate new ideals in old ways. In making this case, it is important to remember that Rojas did not see himself as pointing towards future forms or viewpoints. The name Renaissance is a modern construct, and Rojas did not purposefully try to move his audience into the new forms of that era. However, as will be seen below, his work did prefigure many of the forms that would be identified in modern times as part of a new literary period. Understanding the transitional position in which Rojas existed will allow him and his work to be compared and contrasted more easily with Tsarfati and his works.

If Rojas did indeed communicate in ways that combined elements of medieval and Renaissance forms, this connection with both eras would help explain some of *Celestina's* popularity. Artists need to take into account that which their audiences are able to understand and accept, or their "horizon of expectations," as discussed above.[101] They need to balance – whether purposefully or not – the need of the audience to understand the work with its desire to hear something new. If the concepts or forms are too radically new, the audience will be confused and frustrated by the work, much like modern students first learning to appreciate Picasso or to appreciate musical works which predominantly employ dissonance. However, if the artist does not provide new insights,

[101] Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception,* 8-20.

concepts, or connections, then the audience will become bored. Thus the successful artist stays at the "horizon of expectations" of the audience, within sight. And indeed this is precisely what is found in *Celestina.*

The studies showing *Celestina'*s reliance on other medieval writings are numerous. One of the clearest sources for Rojas's inspiration appears to have been Pamphilus's elegiac comedy of the twelfth century, in which the young Pánfilo falls in love with Galatea, who is unattainable.[102] However, he opens his heart to the goddess of love, Venus, who encourages him to use a procuress to obtain the love of Galatea. A similar reliance on a "go-between," often seen as the direct literary precursor to the character Celestina, can be seen in the fourteenth-century *Libro de Buen Amor* ("Book of Good Love") by Juan Ruiz, in which the cleric don Melòn obtains the love he seeks with doña Endrina through the aid of a woman named "*Trotaconventos*" (literally, trotter between convents).[103] Michelle Hamilton has identified other popular "go-betweens" in the literature of al-Andalus, both Sitnah from al-Harizi's *Tahkemoni*, and Kozbi from Ibn Shabbatay's "The Offering of Yehuda";[104] and Samuel Armistead and James Monroe have identified similar connections in Arabic literature.[105] Many of these would have been literary works with which the literate population of late medieval Spain would likely

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[102] Russell, ed. *Comedia o Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, 55-57.
[103] María Rosa Lida de Malkiel, *Two Spanish Masterpieces: The Book of Good Love and the Celestina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961).
[104] Michelle Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's "Tratado de Melibea y Calisto": A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the Celestina in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," *Sefarad* 62(2002): 329-47.
[105] Samuel G. Armistead and James T. Monroe, "Celestina's Muslim Sisters," *Celestinesca* 13, no. 2 (1989): 3-27.

have been familiar. The latter works would have been known to many of those of Jewish descent.

Rojas also availed himself of the classics that he and his classmates would have memorized in the course of his studies. As mentioned earlier, Rojas's education would have remained for the most part a product of the Scholasticism of the High Middle Ages, which emphasized rote learning and repetition of standard texts that were based in the Greek works that had been translated into Arabic in Spain during the tenth and eleventh centuries.[106] Rojas uses precisely these texts extensively and with great accuracy in *Celestina.* In contrast, he does not use any of the texts that would become popular under the Renaissance, although organization and thought processes in *Celestina* often mirror the concerns of the Renaissance, as will be seen below.

The opening scene of Act I appears to have been inspired by Aristotle's *Ethics*, and also by the *Epistles* of Seneca. Rojas relied heavily upon the Senecian theories from the *Proverbs of Seneca.* (These proverbs were falsely attributed to Seneca in Rojas's time.)[107] Rojas used many phrases that would have been familiar to much of his educated audience as the wisdom of the ancients, all taken from his study of these texts in college. He referred to these in his introductory letter as "*las sentencias y dichos de philósophos* (Eng. the statements and sayings of philosophers)."[108] This recitation and use of brief quotations and familiar phrases from the classics was a popular technique during the

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106 Kallendorf, ed. *Humanist Educational Treatises*, vii-viii.
107 Russell, ed. *Comedia o Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, 55-57; Carmelo M. Bonet, "El Estilo de *La Celestina* y su Relación con el Plateresco," *Criterio* 26(1953): 21-34.
108 Sánchez-Cascado, ed. *La Celestina*, 51.

Middle Ages which would have communicated to Rojas's audience that he was worthy of trust and would have given the sense that they were being taught truths about life.[109]

Other popular works from the Middle Ages were also used by Rojas. The most important were the works of Francesco Petrarca from the fourteenth century, especially *De remediis utriusque fortunae* (On Remedies against Adverse Fortune), and *De rebus familiaribus* (Agreeable Epistles).[110] These had recently been printed in Spain in 1496, but were already part of Rojas's memorization curriculum. Rojas uses phrases from Petrarca without error as a frequent source of pithy wisdom. Others have cited similarities with such popular medieval Spanish books as *Cárcel de Amor* (Prison of Love) by Diego de San Pedro and *Diálogo Entre el Amor y un Viejo* (Dialogue between Love and an Old Man) by Rodrigo Cota.[111]

However, notwithstanding each of these connections to medieval works, *Celestina* completely alters and supersedes the original form and style of the work to which it is being compared. For example, after demonstrating the many similarities between *Celestina* and *Cárcel de Amor*, Peter Russell goes on to qualify his statements by stating that, "Nothing could be further… from the closed and uniform world of the *Cárcel* than [*Celestina*], with its open and experimental structure, the multiplicity of its perspectives, the variety of its didactic sources, and its cult of ambiguity."[112] Russell's description fits well with Renaissance modes of thought, which were often ambiguous

[109] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 93.
[110] Cándido Ayllón, "Petrarch and Fernando de Rojas," *Romanic Review* 54(1963): 81-94; *The Petrarchan Sources of "La Celestina"*, 1961.
[111] Russell, ed. *Comedia o Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea*, 55-57.
[112] Ibid., 57. Translation mine.

and unconcerned with moral certainty in ways that would have been completely foreign to earlier works. In comparison, the Renaissance centered on the beauty of language, oratory, and communication as talents of inherent value, and not just as a means to an end.[113] Russell later states that although Rojas makes use of familiar classic phrases and maxims as was popular in medieval works, he often uses these phrases in the mouth of someone who could only have meant them sarcastically, turning the phrases on their heads. Thus Rojas spoke to his audiences in the literary language of the Middle Ages, but did so, unwittingly, in a way that prefigured the Renaissance.

A similar transforming of medieval forms into a new direction can be found in the dialogic nature of the work. *Celestina*'s use of dialogue without narration is reminiscent of thirteenth-century works in debate form such as *Disputa del Alma y el Cuerpo* (*Argument Between the Soul and the Body*), *Razón de Amor* (*The Reason of Love*), and *Elena y María*. It can be found again in the fifteenth century in *Tractado del Cuerpo e de la Anima* (Treatise on the Body and the Soul), and the aforementioned *Diálogo entre el*

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[113] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 92-99; W. Untertitel, "Del Retoricismo al Humanismo," *Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 5(1950): 9-24. The situation was somewhat more complex in the cultural milieu of medieval Spain. Here the three cultures of the *convivencia* (Eng. "living together), Muslims, Jews, and Christians, had each had their own focus on the "sacred" languages of Arabic, Hebrew, and Latin. However this focus on beautiful language was typically more interested in providing rules for the highest forms of the language, and in creating works based on the language in its purest forms, than in appreciating the beauty of the "vulgar" language of the day. This would change over time as Arabic authors and Spanish authors began to use colloquial language (in Arabic known as *badi'*) more extensively in their work. However, the forms of education in the Christian Spain of 1500 mirrored those in other areas of Christian Europe, where a focus on spoken language for its own sake – and as it was actually spoken by the general population -- was only beginning to emerge. See Gampel, "Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia: *Convivencia* through the Eyes of Sephardic Jews," 11-15. Mansour Ajami, *The Neckveins of Winter: The Controversy over Natural and Artificial Poetry in Medieval Arabic Literary Criticism* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), 2-5; Maria Rosa Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin, and Michael Anthony Sells, *The Literature of Al-Andalus* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), v-vi; Angel Saenz-Badillos, "Philologians and Poets, In Search of the Hebrew Language," in *Languages of Power in Islamic Spain*, ed. Ross Brann (Bethesda, Md.: CDL Press, 1997), 49-59.

amor y un Viejo. Jewish medieval works using dialogue include the *Tahkemoni* and others.[114] However, while mimicking the form, Rojas's work again employs the form in ways not typical of medieval literature. In most of these works, the dialogue is between only two individuals, both of whom propose differing viewpoints. Typically the purpose of the work is overtly didactic, marching from one conclusion to another with measured consistency. None of these works even slightly anticipates the type of dialogue, marked by ambiguity, encountered in *Celestina*.[115] Rojas seems concerned with the beauty and wit of the dialogues themselves, and appears to find joy in the constantly varying and mutable characters which the dialogues reveal – a multiplicity of viewpoints from numerous characters who have varied and internally conflicting motivations and thought processes. It is this type of focus on the mind as revealed through dialogue that has caused Gilman to describe *Celestina* as the precursor to the modern novel *and* to modern drama.[116]

Besides this switch in emphasis on language, some scholars have argued that a shift in the obsession with love also occurred at this time.[117] Although there is no

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114 Deyermond, *A Literary History of Spain: The Middle Ages*, 72-76, 188-90.
115 Peter E. Russell, "Notes: Ambiguity in *La Celestina*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 40(1963): 35-40.
116 Gilman, "Diálogo y estilo en La Celestina," 470-74.
117 For a discussion of courtly love in medieval times, see Alexander A. Parker, *The Philosophy of Love in Spanish Literature, 1480-1680* (Edinburgh: University Press, 1985), 20-31. C. S. Lewis summed up the rules in this way: "The sentiment is love… but love of a highly specialized sort, whose characteristics may be enumerated as Humility, Courtesy, Adultery, and the Religion of Love." Clives S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936). For a discussion of the attitude toward during the Renaissance, see Dale V. Kent, *Frienship, Love, and Trust in Renaissance Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 52-75; John C. Nelson, *Renaissance Theory of Love: The Context of Giordano Bruno's Eroisi Furori* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), 12-24; Albert J. Smith, *The Metaphysics of Love: Studies in Renaissance Love Poetry from Dante to Milton* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

scholarly consensus on whether a shift occurred, Rojas's focus on love in *Celestina* as an attribute that can reward and betray fit well in his time period,[118] and match Tsarfati's attitude toward love, as will be seen below. Later in this chapter, Rojas's attitude toward love will be analyzed further with regard to the *converso* experience.

One final way in which Rojas's work prefigured forms that have been connected with the Renaissance has been suggested above, and needs to be discussed further as a precursor to the following section. Although Rojas used familiar forms time after time, the ambiguity, irony, undercurrents, and skepticism which he developed and portrayed in *Celestina* were a complete break from medieval literature.[119] Although, as will be seen below, the skepticism, deception, and irony that he created would have reflected the environment of an important segment of his audience and would have been a welcome and exciting literary innovation for them, his skillful weaving of these elements into his text was completely unprecedented. In his creation of *Celestina*, Rojas adeptly moved his audience from one familiar era, into the horizons of the audience's expectations, and into the exciting new vistas being opened by the Renaissance.

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[118] For discussions on the attitude toward love expressed in *Celestina,* see José M. Aguirre, *Calisto y Melibea: Amantes Cortesanos* (Zaragoza: Almenara, 1962), 13-16; Erna Ruth Berndt, *Amor, Muerte, y Fortuna en "La Celestina"* (Madrid: Gredos, 1963); June Hall Martin, *Love's Fools: Auccasin, Troilus, Calisto, and the Parody of the Courtly Lover* (London: Tamesis, 1972), 119-24.

[119] David G. Pattison, "Is Celestina a Medieval Work?," *The Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 86, no. 1 (2009): 117-18; Russell, "Notes: Ambiguity in *La Celestina*," 35-40; J. A. Moore, "Ambivalence of Will in *La Celestina*," *Hispania* 47(1964): 251-55; Jack Himelblau, "A Further Contribution to the Ironic Vision in *Tragicomedia*," *Romance Notes* 9(1968): 310-13. However, as previously mentioned, not all scholars agree that there is ambiguity or subversive elements in the work, but see the work as purely didactic. For example, see Robert Ricard, "La Moralidad de *La Celestina*," *Abside* 4(1940): 230-37. Also, see note 120.

ROJAS AND *CELESTINA* AS A GO-BETWEEN FOR THE OLD CHRISTIAN AND NEW CHRISTIAN (*CONVERSO*)

Another explanation for *Celestina*'s enormous popularity may lie in Rojas's ability to communicate to both a *converso* and a Christian non-*converso* audience. While it is an oversimplification of the issues at hand at the time, it is still true that Old Christians would have identified very closely with orthodox Christian themes and values. While they may have felt some attraction to new Renaissance themes challenging these values, many of them would have felt comfortable with a book that clearly supported the dominant hierarchy of which they were a part. On the other hand, as discussed above, many *conversos* would have felt a connection with works that were subversive of that overarching society, and would have enjoyed finding their world of hidden messages, meanings, and masks in a subversive work such as *Celestina*.

Evidence of Rojas's success in hiding his purposes and speaking to varied audiences can be seen in the disagreement of modern scholars, who continue to argue over whether the work was meant to be moralizing and didactic by Rojas, supporting the agenda of the dominant society, or whether it is a deeply subversive work.[120] The

[120] It is interesting to note that the same scholars who question Rojas's identity as a *converso*, also question the subversive content of his work, *Celestina*. For a list of many of these scholars, see notes 27 and 88. Most of the work of these scholars is nationalistic in tone. It appears that some of them do not want to lose Rojas as a "true Spaniard," part of the upstanding, moral, Christian past of Spain's Golden Age of literature.

On the other hand, many of these scholars are reacting to the broad (and, in my opinion, too far-reaching) views of the controversial Hispanist Américo Castro, who believed that the existence of a large *converso* population was the key to reading almost all Spanish literature. See Américo Castro, *The Structure of Spanish History*, trans. Edmund L. King (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1954). As a primary example of the subversive discourse found in Spanish literature, he focused on the *converso* nature of *Celestina.* See ———, *La Celestina como Contienda Literaria: Castas y Casticismos* (Madrid:

opinions are stated strongly. Marcel Bataillón, for example, in his seminal work entitled *La Celestine selon Fernando de Rojas*, insists that Rojas makes his purpose clear in his introductory material, and then goes on to prove just how negative the evil whispers of go-betweens and servants can really be, and just how destructive the wiles of illicit love are.[121] According to Bataillón, Rojas warns the reader in his introduction of exactly the mistake that some modern readers make. They get too caught up in the love story and fail to heed the moral. In a work with no narrator, Bataillón insists that the reader must trust the narrator when he does speak (in the introduction). Other critics add that if the work is so clearly subversive, then it should have occasioned much more difficulty with the Inquisition than it did. Green points out that while it does turn up on several Indexes of banned books, so did most other works at one point or another, and when the actual

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Revista de Occidente, 1965). However, a rejection of Castro's overarching assertions does not need to be accompanied by a rejection of any of the examples that he employed, such as that of *Celestina.* While not all of Spanish literature can be viewed through the lens of the *converso* situation in Spain, certainly some literature can and should be so viewed.

These scholars argue against two additional tendencies in the scholarship of those who look for elements of *converso* identity in *Celestina*: 1) The belief that an analysis of the text can "prove" that Rojas was a *converso* – In this regard they rightly argue that these arguments are often circular, only serving to reinforce the initial assumption – and 2) the apparent belief that Rojas's *converso* identity is the only, or at least the most important, key to understanding the work, while ignoring many other important forces that were in play at the time of Rojas's authorship. With regards to these objections, I have worked to show the evidence of Rojas's *converso* identity through documents outside of the text of *Celestina.* I readily acknowledge that any discussion of potential *converso* elements in the text is only one piece to the many important viewpoints that can be brought to bear on *Celestina.*

Additionally, some modern scholars would suggest that literature must be read and analyzed completely apart from its historical context. These scholars view literature as an act of pure creation, and seek to avoid the circular arguments that are sometimes created when connecting literature with history. While recognizing the validity of some of these concerns, I view literature as flowing from specific historical contexts, as inseparable from these contexts, and as the product of authors who were themselves to a great degree products of these contexts.

[121] Bataillon, *La Célestine selon Fernando de Rojas*, 83-90.

phrases that were blotted out in the book by the Inquisition are studied, they are quite few in number.[122]

Others have spoken just as strongly on the other side of the argument, stating that using this type of prologue is exactly the type of dissimulation that should be found in a subversive work, and that the mask play, subversion, and irony begin at this point.[123] The argument has at times been divided between those who refuse to see Rojas as a *converso* on the one side, and those who acknowledge his *converso* background on the other.[124] However, there are many scholars who acknowledge Rojas's *converso* identity, but still maintain that this should not lead the modern scholar to see evidence of that identity in his work. For my part, having initially studied the work on its own without the introductory material (as it was first published in 1499), I was immediately drawn to the ironic, complex, subversive themes that it presented. It can be fairly stated that for one who was seeking to warn the reader of the dangers of love, Rojas paints his characters and their longings and dissimulations with too much real affection, vivacity, and exuberance to not partake of some of their disaffection from society. In my view, there is simply no evidence throughout the dialogues of the work that Rojas desires to teach any morals. The only evidence of moralizing besides the introductory materials to which one may point is the tragic end at which the lovers arrive, theoretically showing the dangers

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[122] Green, "The *Celestina* and the Inquisition," 211-15; ———, "Additional Notes on the *Celestina* and the Inquisition," 70-71.

[123] For just two of many examples which are referred to in this study, see Cándido Ayllón, "Pessimism in the *Celestina*" (University of Wisconsin, 1956); and J. Campos, "*Celestina*, Tragedia Social," in *Suplemento Literario de El Nacional* (Caracas: El Nacional, 1958), 47-54.

[124] See discussion in note 120.

of illicit love. (On the other hand, as has been mentioned, Calisto's death came in part as the result of the only altruistic inclination which he showed throughout the entire work – checking on the welfare of his servants – and may indicate instead that altruism does not necessarily contain sufficient rewards.) Pleberio's final rant against love, as will be seen below, is phrased more as a bitter tirade against the forces of the world that work against him and his loved ones, betraying them time after time, than as a final injunction against illicit love. Therefore, although it is certainly not the only key to understanding the many nuances of *Celestina*, the *converso* background of skepticism, despair, worldliness, and subversion will be used throughout the remainder of this chapter to highlight these same themes in Rojas's work.

Foucault's theories of the "gaze" of the dominant hierarchy have relevance with regards to *Celestina*.[125] As will be seen, the discourse in *Celestina* is set up by Rojas in opposition to the dominant hierarchy from its early beginnings, and continues to be defined in relation to that hierarchy throughout. However, Rojas did so in creative, new ways that were subtle enough to escape the attention of the regime that he sought to undermine. During the following analyses, I will closely read four segments of *Celestina* – 1) the prologue, 2) Celestina's initial conversation with Alisa and Melibea, 3) the dinner in Celestina's home, and 4) Pleberio's lament against love. In each of these sections I will also include other passages that support my analysis of the text. My goal in this discussion is to uncover subversive elements which can be connected with Rojas's

[125] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

identity as a *converso*. I will not only discuss the subversive elements in these sections, although this will be my primary focus, but will also mention evidences that Rojas at the same time sought to communicate with a traditional Christian audience, emphasizing his role as a "go-between."

Throughout this discussion, the reality, size, and importance of the *converso* audience in medieval Spain should be remembered. Kamen estimates that approximately 40,000 Jews converted to Christianity in the three months prior to the expulsion in 1492.[126] This is, of course, in addition to the numbers of Jews – to estimate the number in the hundreds of thousands would possibly too high, but to estimate it in the tens of thousands is definitely too low – that converted to Christianity before this time, beginning after the pogroms of 1391.[127] Indeed, a recent genetic study indicated that 20% of modern inhabitants of Spain are descended from Jewish ancestors, notwithstanding the large numbers of Jews who continued to leave Spain even after the official expulsion.[128]

1) The Prologue and a World of Conflict and Contention

After the overtly didactic messages of Rojas's letter to a friend, and the acrostic rhymes providing his name and repeating the same moralizing purposes, the reader is confronted with a stark and immediate change when arriving at the prologue. As Rojas states: "It is the saying of that great and wise philosopher Heraclitus that all things are

126 Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 29-31.
127 Yitzhak Baer, *A history of the Jews in Christian Spain*, trans. Louis Schoffman, 1st ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961), 12-13.
128 S. Marshall Adams, "The Genetic Legacy of Religious Diversity and Intolerance: Paternal Lineages of Christians, Jews, and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula," *American Journal of Human Genetics* 83, no. 6 (2008): 723-36.

created in manner of a contention (*contienda*) or battle… A sentence in my opinion worthy of perpetual memory."[129] This first statement jumps out boldly. It was definitely not in line with Christian dogma of the time, which would have seen a divine order imposed on all the actions of the earth, the heavens, the relationships of beasts, and the strivings of mankind.[130] The orthodox Christian of the time would not necessarily have been surprised to find momentary evidences of chaos or strife. The biblical book of Revelation indicates great conflict between the forces of good and evil, but these conflicts are seen as a temporary prelude to the restoration of order that would occur immediately thereafter. In addition, Rojas asserted that things are "created" in the manner of "contention" or "battle." In a Christian orthodoxy that proclaimed God as the ultimate creator, and fully responsible for bringing the creation to its full form "out of nothingness,"[131] this declaration immediately begins to reveal the author's belief that something is amiss with these supposed orderly creations of God. This opening sentence does not battle against Christian moral values by rejoicing in the rejection of them.

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[129] "Todas las coasas ser criadas a manera de contienda o batalla, dice aquel gran sabio Heráclito… Sentencia a mi ver digna de perpetua y recordable memoria." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 58. For the English translation, see Fernando de Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, trans. James Mabbe (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1908), 8. Since Lesley Simpson did not include the prologue in her English translation, all translations of *Celestina* from the prologue will be taken from James Mabbe's translation. All other translations from the work will be taken from Lesley Simpson's edition.

[130] James Ginther, *The Westminster Handbook to Medieval Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 193-95.

[131] See Robert C. Figueira, *Plenitude of Power: The Doctrine and Exercise of Authority in the Middle Ages* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2007), 32-35. See also Chad Meister, *Christian Thought: A Historical Introduction* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2010), 40-41.

Instead, it presents a world scheme that is "a-moral," or which exists outside of the framework of right or wrong.[132] In this worldview all of creation simply exists.[133]

Nor does this stance from the author resolve itself into more orderly patterns later on in the prologue. Rojas's intent is not to show that the difficulty of life is appropriate and ultimately moral and orderly because important lessons can be learned from the challenges. Instead, he simply shows that life is continuous strife, a constant battle in which opposing wills consistently bump against each other in violent ways without any sense of purpose. Rojas states, "Nature, who is the mother of all things, engendered nothing without strife and confusion."[134] Nature, not God, is the author of this universe. By itself this phrase can be excused as having been benignly expressed by many authors. In fact it is a direct quotation from Petrarca, attributed to him by Rojas.[135] However, in light of Rojas's background, his potential audiences, and the strong religious discourse in

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[132] The dominant, Christian culture at that time universally saw all viewpoints and behaviors either as morally proper, true, and correct; or as improper, incorrect, and immoral. While immoral behaviors or viewpoints would be viewed as directly opposing the moral ideology of the dominant culture, they would still support the overall structure of society provided by that culture. In contrast, Rojas indicates an "amoral" attitude or viewpoint that portrays reality as existing outside the boundaries of right and wrong which had been provided by the dominant culture, and would claim that reality should be not be viewed in these absolutes. A number of scholars have discussed the prologue in light of its message and framing of the overall work, although not to the degree done in this study, and not with the same focus and comparison with the Christian theology of the time. These works include: E. Figueroa de Amaral, "Conflicto Racial en *La Celestina*," *Revista Bimestre Cubana* 71(1956): 20-68; José Antonio Maraval, *El Mundo Social de La Celestina* (Madrid: Editorial Gredos, 1964), 28-32; Peter E. Russell, "Literary Tradition and Social Reality in *La Celestina*," *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies* 41(1964): 231-32. Although my analysis differs markedly from that of Castro, his scholarship provides the most extensive analysis of this section: Castro, *La Celestina como Contienda Literaria: Castas y Casticismos*, 35-42.

[133] Other scholars have analyzed the pessimistic view of fate that exists in *Celestina.* See Ayllón, "Pessimism in the *Celestina*". However, this view has not been analyzed before as subversive to the ideology of the dominant hierarchy.

[134] Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, 8. "Sin lid y ofensión ninguna cosa engendró la batura, madre de todo." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 58.

[135] Ayllón, "Petrarch and Fernando de Rojas," 87.

his day, this statement is much more easily taken as having a deeper meaning, skeptical of religious certainty.

Rojas then goes on to describe this nature – winds and atmospheric elements that fight against each other, stars that "encounter" one another in the heavens, the sea battling against the earth, fire crackling against the darkness and sparkling forth its fury, the earthquakes in which pieces of the earth fight against each other, and the seasons that push each other constantly out of the way to make room for themselves. Not only does inanimate nature fight against itself with fury, but it constantly fights against mankind as well, using whirlwinds, floods, droughts, earthquakes, and tempests. According to Rojas, all animals are in conflict with each other: the dog chases the hare, the powerful elephant is afraid of the tiny mouse, and the vipers destroy even their own mates with a powerful bite. Although I would not necessarily assert that this mention of the powerful elephant which fears the tiny mouse purposefully alludes to the Catholic church and the *converso*, the image created is reminiscent of that relationship. Similarly, the vipers who destroy each other are reminiscent of the accusations that one member of the *converso* population would at times levy against another. This type of conflict and betrayal is all the more shocking since the vipers are of the same species.

Rojas takes pains to show how a-moral the nature of animals is: the snake that is conceived in its mother's womb proceeds to eat its way through her insides in order to escape after birth. As he describes it, "What greater conflict, what greater contention or

war can there be, than to conceive that in her body which shall eat out her entrails?"[136] Again, not only do the animals war against each other, but they war against mankind incessantly. A tiny fish can latch onto a boat and cause it to stop in its course. A giant roc can lift entire boats out of the water to destroy all their sailors and passengers.

Rojas finally reaches a discussion of contention among mankind, a theme which will dominate *Celestina*. He has no positive words to describe them, but instead states:

> But what shall we say of men…? Who can express their wars, their jarrings, their enmities, their envies, their hearts, their broils, their brawls, and their discontentments; that change and alteration of fashions in their apparel; that pulling down and building up of houses…; all of them proceeding from the feeble and weak condition of man's variable nature?"[137]

In this last phrase, Rojas shows one of his primary points of interest in the development of his work: human beings are variable and constantly shifting. It is impossible to predict how they will act from one moment to the next, except for the certainty that they will act in favor of their own selfish, momentary interests – with greed, envy, lust, and revenge. The consistency of this view – that humans do not speak or act according to set principles, but instead according to the whim of the moment – will be demonstrated amply over the course of his work. However, Rojas's words not only show a world in conflict, but they also show that men are universally unhappy and unkind. This is certainly a pessimistic world view. While Rojas definitely lived in a world that was

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[136] Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, 10. "¿Qué mayor lid, qué mayor conquista ni guerra que engendrar en su cuerpo quien coma sus entrañas?" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 59.

[137] Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, 11. "¿Pues que diremos entre los hombres…? ¿Quién explanará sus guerras, sus enemistades, sus envidias, sus aceleramientos y movimientos y descontentamientos? ¿Aquel mudar de trajes, aquel derribar y renovar edificios… que de esta nuestra flaca humanidad nos provienen?" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 60.

concerned with fashion, the reference of the changing of apparel may also have reminded the *converso* of the special clothes that Jews were required to wear by the church before the expulsion, and of the penitential garb that Judaizing *conversos* were forced to wear after that time.

Since the prologue was added three years after the initial edition, by the time he wrote the prologue Rojas had seen plenty of evidence of this kind of conflict even in the love and animosity that his work has engendered. He wrote: "I will not marvel much if this present work shall prove an instrument of war to its readers, putting strifes and differences amongst them, every one giving his verdict and opinion thereupon according to the humor of his own will."[138] Rojas's prediction is particularly fascinating in light of the quantity of strife it has engendered among modern scholars. According to Rojas, some will say his work is too long, and others will say it is too short. He goes on to state that there will be many who will "gnaw at the bones, which have no virtue in them... They do not avail themselves of the particulars."[139] With this and other sentences he claims that few if any will even understand the real purpose, the hidden particulars of his work. Even those who "gnaw" at the work to the degree that they get to its "bones" will still not dig deep enough to find the true marrow or meaning of what the author is attempting to show. Does he refer to subversive meanings and coded messages that only those from his own background will be able to understand? Or is he simply piquing the

[138] Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, 11. "No quiero maravillarme si esta presente obra ha sido instrumento de lid o contienda a sus lectores para ponerlos en diferencias, dando cada uno sentencia sobre ella a sabor de su voluntad." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 60.
[139] Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, 11. "Unos les roen los huesos que no tienen virtud… no aprovechándose de las particularidades." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 61.

curiosity of all of his readers, so that each one will look deeper to discover the reality for which their own cultural outlook prepares them?

Rojas continues to enumerate the other criticisms that he has received about his book. He appears to be somewhat sensitive to these complaints, but still refrains from telling the reader exactly what she should understand from this great story of conflict (although he did not similarly refrain in the introduction.) He then presents the new name of his work, "the Tragi-comedy." Even the title of the work will exhibit a struggle between the two opposites of tragedy and comedy, caused by Rojas's almost completely successful desire to please everyone, and to give all his audiences something of interest.

Rojas concludes his prologue with this statement full of meaning: "I know I shall not want new detractors for my new edition."[140] This prologue is the first glimpse that the reader has of the way in which Rojas views his universe. It is not a universe that contains any rational meaning. According to Rojas, some will say that the work is too short, and some will say that it is too long, but there is no hope offered of a solution to the question. Rojas's final statement shows him deeply suspicious of his world and fully aware that he will have a battle on his hands no matter what he does, even if he tries to placate both sides by calling his work both a tragedy and a comedy. He is not hopeful to avoid detractors. In fact, he is confident that there *will* be detractors, and has even tried to prepare for them in advance by discussing his work in the prologue. Rojas lives in a universe that is turned eternally against him.

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[140] Rojas, *Celestina: or, The Tragi-comedy of Calisto and Melibea*, 12. "No han de faltar nuevos detractores a la nueva adición" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 62.

This is a worldview that is subversive to Catholic dogma – and it is of note that with all of his references to classical authorities, not once has he made the slightest mention of any Christian religious figures or authorities, but has instead completely avoided them as if they do not exist or do not have importance in his world. The prologue also gives evidence of the profoundly pessimistic worldview of an individual who has been treated harshly over and over again by his society, and who may not be able to trust anyone. According to a Foucauldian worldview, this is how the prisoner acts, even in the face of good fortune. He is certain that society will turn against him again in order to take everything away. The prisoner or convicted criminal cannot ever trust or let down his guard.[141] For Rojas, if all are in contention, then even close friends or family members may turn against him at any moment. Notwithstanding the attitudes of skepticism that would later become a part of many literary works, Rojas's background as a *converso* speaks loudly here. Rojas himself is living in a world of suspicion and siege, in which any of his neighbors or associates could choose to have him called up before the Inquisition at any moment.

This same deep distrust of the motives and statements of others is expressed by Calisto later in the work.[142] After having been led by Celestina to believe that Melibea would be overjoyed to receive his first visit, Melibea is instead cautious, causing Calisto to sink back into despair. He accuses Celestina of deceiving him with hope, and then

[141] Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 48-51.

[142] The ideas expressed in the analysis of the prologue are completely mine. However, for assistance with many of the ideas presented in the remainder of this section, I am indebted to Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 97-103. Although I use these ideas differently than in Yovel, his presentation aided my discovery and expression of them in this study.

states: "Where can I find the truth? Who is an open enemy? Who a true friend? Where is treachery not found? Who is it that dared to plant this cruel hope in me?"[143] This is the same pessimistic worldview contained in the prologue. Earlier, when Celestina had been trying to convince Pármeno to join the conspiracy against Calisto, he had echoed the same sentiment, "Upon my word, mother, I can't believe anyone anymore."[144] In a world such as that of the Inquisition in which words can be used with great force to damage or to reward, and in which all partake of dissimulation for profit in one way or another, eventually no one's words can be believed.

The battle of the *converso* life between reality and falsity can be seen as a thread winding its way through the entire work. Since many *converso*s lived in a dual world, with one appearance on the outside covering another, inner identity, the conflict and confusion between these identities, and the uncertainty, even to the dissimulator, of which identity represented reality was a theme that would have been well understood and appreciated by Rojas's *converso* audience.[145] It is likely that those playing out these dual roles often did not even trust their own feelings, words, and actions. *Conversos* would have become expert at the type of word choice that was earlier seen coming from Rojas's mouth when asked to defend his friend from the Inquisition. Deception became a close friend that kept them alive.

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[143] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 131. Act 12. "¿Adónde hay verdad? ¿Quién carece de engaño? ¿Adónde no moran falsarios? ¿Quién es claro enemigo? ¿Quién es verdadero amigo? ¿Dónde no se fabrican traiciones? ¿Quén osó darme tan cruda experancza de perdición?" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 213.
[144] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 28. Act 1. "Mi fe, madre, no creo en nadie." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 95.
[145] Yovel, *The Other Within*, 54.

Before bitterly learning that he could not trust anyone, Pármeno had been innocent enough to believe that words should be used in a straightforward, honest fashion. When Calisto asks Pármeno what he thinks of his desire for Melibea, Calisto encourages Pármeno to speak honestly. However, when Pármeno does give him good advice, encouraging him to avoid the dangers of this type of union with Melibea, Calisto becomes angry at his servant. He doesn't really want Pármeno's true opinion, but prefers the flattery of his other servant, Sempronio, who uses morals and maxims as it suits his purposes, only to say the opposite later on in the work when his needs change. Sempronio, who lies to and flatters his master, is the one who Calisto appreciates, while Pármeno the truth teller becomes his temporary enemy and is punished for his honesty. Pármeno astutely learns the lesson about honesty which was quoted above. He quickly joins Sempronio in flattering and betraying his master, which is what Calisto truly desires. As Pármeno expresses it: "It's what I get for being loyal, while others profit by their treachery. That's the way the world wags! But from now on I'll swim with the current, since traitors are called wise, and the loyal, fools!... I've learned my lesson![146] These words from the hitherto honest Pármeno would have stung or warmed every *converso* heart. Under the influence of the Inquisition each *converso* had either gone through the same decision-making process – whether or not to stay quiet no matter what his or her beliefs – or knew those who had. Later in the work Pármeno shows just how

[146] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 36. Act 2. "Por ser leal padezco mal; otros se ganan por malos; yo me pierdo por bueno. El mundo es tal. Quiero irme al hilo de la gente, pues a los traidores llanan discretos, a los fieles necios…Mas esto me porná escarmiento de aquí adelante con él." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 104.

completely he has learned his lesson, while stating another reality with which the *converso* would have been very familiar – material, physical need and comfort. When Sempronio questions just who taught Celestina her art of deception and conflict so effectively, Pármeno states: "Necessity, poverty, and hunger. There are no better teachers in the world, nothing that wakes up and sharpens the wits so well."[147]

These types of dissimulations and verbal battles between individuals exist in every portion of the work. Servants, masters, and procuress state one belief at one moment, only to betray their sarcasm the next when they reverse direction. Sempronio at one point reveals a deep criticism of the pure lineages that Old Christians and the Inquisition prized so much. He states:

> Some say that nobility is the most praiseworthy which comes from the merit and antiquity of one´s ancestors, but I say that reflected light will never make you noble if you give off none of your own. Don't take too much pride, therefore, in the nobility of your father, who indeed was magnificent, but in your own, for thus you gain honor, which is the highest good attainable by man.[148]

In other words, Sempronio is stating a view which may have been attractive to many *conversos*, including Rojas, that men should be judged on their own merits and hard work, and not by virtue of their Spanish ancestry, or on the purity of their Spanish bloodlines. However, in Act Nine Sempronio changes course, stating the opposite and

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[147] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 103. Act 9. "La necesidad y pobreza, el hambre, que no hay mejor maestra en el mundo, no hay mejor despertadora y avivadora de ingenios." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 180.

[148] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 32. Act 2. "Y dicen algunos que la nobleza es una alabanza que proviene de los merecimimentos y antigüedad de los padres; yo digo que la ajena luz nunca te hará claro si la propia no tienes. Y por tanto no te estimes en la claridad de tu padre, que tan magnífico fue, sino en la tuya, y así se gana la honra, que es el mayor bien de los que son fuera de hombre." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 99.

leaving Areusa to use his own previously-stated argument against him, and causing the reader to believe that his earlier statement was just another example of Sempronio using morals, religion, or passionate principles to get his way.

While many of the views espoused by *Celestina's* characters would have been recognizable to Rojas's *converso* audience, it is impossible with certainty to know which view Rojas himself espouses. In fact, as explained above, it was impossible for any *converso* or Christian non-*converso* to know exactly what the real views of individual *conversos* were. Was their conversion to Christianity sincere? Were they inwardly torn between the two faiths? Did anything that they said, even statements made to their closest associates in the most private of settings, reflect reality, and did the *converso* even know what his reality was anymore? *Celestina* clearly reflects this world of uncertainty. The switching of viewpoints and the reversing of position seem to provide the author more satisfaction than the pronouncement of any particular viewpoint.

Indeed, it was necessary for Rojas to make his viewpoints uncertain if he desired to survive the watchful gaze of the Inquisition. As stated above, the conflicts and battles over interpretation still evinced by modern scholars witness to Rojas's masterful success. This is, indeed, a worldview steeped in conflict, distrust, and suspicion, just as Rojas's prologue described it.

2) Celestina, Alisa, and Melibea – Converso Identity & The Power of Language for the Go-Between

Before proceeding to analysis of Act Four, in which Celestina first successfully persuades Melibea to consider Calisto, it is important to consider textual clues outside of Act Four that may connect certain characters with a *converso* existence. As has been seen in the preceding section, the power of language to convince, dissimulate, and persuade was a powerful and fascinating tool, especially for one such as Rojas who needed to simultaneously persuade multiple groups. This was often the case for the *converso*, who needed to gain entrance into the dominant society of Spain, but typically could not risk being ostracized from his own, whether they were family members, *converso* neighbors, or others (including the individual's own self).[149] So the *converso* became talented with the ambiguities of language, leaving herself space to function on all different levels of society. It is no surprise that Rojas was drawn to jurisprudence, which involves the art of persuasion whether one necessarily believes one's client to be guilty or not. It is also not surprising that Rojas was drawn to the art of beautiful communication, a literary focus that would rapidly increase in emphasis during the Renaissance.[150]

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[149] Beinart, "'edim yehudim mita'am hatevi'ah beveyt din ha'inqvizitzyah," 1:483-91.

[150] In fact, during the course of my studies, I have frequently been surprised at how closely the needs and situation of the *converso* have matched the attributes of the Renaissance. That the Renaissance would begin at approximately the same time as the Inquisition was gaining force and power in the *converso* world is an interesting connection that may have more than accidental causality, especially considering the number of those in Europe who would have been connected to the *converso* situation in some form. The *conversos* were often more educated than those around them and had strong influence in university settings where the Renaissance would gain much of its power.

Melibea as Converso?

Previous scholarship has suggested the possibility that Rojas created the character Melibea as a *converso,* the daughter of wealthy New Christians.[151] This would explain much in the work, including the fact that Calisto and Melibea do not initially even consider the possibility of marriage, setting up a type of Romeo and Juliet relationship in which both partners are from opposite ends of a social divide. Yirmiyahu Yovel has disagreed with this proposal, listing statements in the work that indicate Melibea's status as a nobleman's daughter.[152] In particular he quotes this statement from Sempronio: "Calisto's a gentleman (*caballero*) and Melibea's a lady (*hijadalgo*), and they naturally prefer those born in their own class (*nacidos por linaje*, literally "born of lineage")."[153] I find it curious that Yovel, who saw so much of deception and subterfuge in *Celestina*, should ignore one of the fundamental aspects of the New Christians, which was the effort to conceal their past and obtain evidence of pure Christian lineage. Often the *converso's* Jewish lineage might be known to others in the community, but because of money or other power considerations, the community would allow attempts to falsify lineage in order to curry favor. At any rate, as has been stated before, claims of lineage were not to

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[151] For example, see Fernando Garrido Pallardó, *Los Problemas de Calisto y Melibea y el Conflicto de su Autor* (Figueras: Canigó, 1957); Poncela S. Serrano, "El Secreto de Melibea," *Cuadernos Americanos* 17(1958): 488-510; Fernando Garrido Pallardó, "Un Secreto Muy Mal Guardado," *Canigó* 74(1960): 51-60.

[152] Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 115-16. For others who have disagreed that Melibea represents a *converso*, see also Álvaro Custodio, "Sobre el Secreto de Melibea," *Cuadernos Americanos* 17(1958): 209-13; G. Mallo, "¿Hay un Problema Racial en el Fondo de *La Celestina*?," *Cuadernos por el Progreso de la Libertad de la Cultura* 37(1959): 51-57.

[153] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 106. Act 9. "Calisto es caballero, Melibea hijadalgo, así que los nacidos por linaje escogidos búscanse unos a otros." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 180.

be trusted,[154] and cannot safely be trusted in the mouth of Sempronio, who contradicts himself more than any other character in the text.

Whether or not Melibea and her family should be seen as *conversos* or not, the types of efforts to cross social barriers that would have been necessary for *conversos* are present throughout the work in almost every character. Those who would be considered the "other" – servants, ruffians, procuresses, prostitutes, and spurned lovers – are constantly using language and dissimulation to persuade those who potentially have more power than they do.[155] Sempronio and Pármeno, part of the "other" class of servants, must work to gain the trust of their master through persuasion and deceit. Their goal is to gain more material possessions or material security. Elicia and Areusa, part of the "other" class of prostitutes, must seek to persuade verbally and physically in order to increase their level of social security. Calisto seeks to cross a strong social barrier, whether it be that of *converso* or some other obstacle, when he works with words and when he attempts through the ultimate word smith, Celestina, to persuade Melibea to accept him.

Pármeno as Converso?

There is some textual evidence that Calisto's servant Pármeno could be considered a *converso.* When Celestina is speaking with Pármeno about his deceased mother, she mentions the mother's frequent arrests for violating the norms of society. In

[154] Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 1:192-93.

[155] This class of "others", such as gypsies, criminals, dissidents, Muslims, Jews, and others, stand on the margins of society, at times necessary to society but often despised and oppressed by it. Although in this study I focus on the New Christian as the other, similar characteristics and attitudes could be attributed to any of these groups. It could be argued appropriately that Rojas was writing a work that would appeal to any of these groups.

the Spain of Rojas's day, those arrests for transgressing the norms of the dominant regime would often have been seen by *conversos* as a sign of the Inquisition's work, particularly since more than 90% of those brought before the Inquisition in its first twenty years of existence were Jews.[156] Judaizing *conversos* were frequently referred to in Inquisition documents as those "persevering in sin."[157] However, their need to suffer the public *auto-de-fe* of reconciliation was seen by some of their fellow *conversos* as evidence of their noble, honorable attempt to retain their allegiance to Judaism. Celestina says this about Pármeno's mother:

> They arrested your mother… four other times… Once they accused her of being a witch, because one night they found her working by candlelight… But these are trifles; people must suffer some things in this world in order to maintain their lives and their honor! And how much did she mind it, or let it change her sense! She did not give up her profession on that account, not she! She even got better at it. So much for what you said about *persevering in sin*. She did everything with grace, and, before God and my conscience, so calm was she, even on her ladder, that you'd thought she didn't give a penny for the people down below! And so it is with those who are like her, and have the same worth, and know something like her… She was wrongfully and unreasonably accused; and with false witnesses, and with cruel tortures, was forced to confess to being what she was not.[158]

Although referring to witchcraft here, the lighting of candles was one of the most common offenses of Judaizing *conversos*, who would continue to light candles before the

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[156] See note 4.

[157] Lea, *Chapters from the Religious History of Spain Connected with the Inquisition*, 202.

[158] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 83. Act 7. Emphasis added. "Prendieron cuatro veces a tu madre… Y aun la una le levantaron que era bruja, porque la hallaron de noche con unas candelillas… Pero no fue nada. Algo han de sufrir los hombres en este triste mundo para sustentar sus vidas y honras. Y mira en cuán poco lo tuvo con su buen seso, que ni por eso dejó dende en adelante de usar mejor su oficio. Esto ha venido por lo que decías del perserverar en lo que una vez se yerra. En todo tenía gracia. Que en Dios y en mi conciencia, aun en aquella escalera estaba y parecía que a todos los de bajo tenía en una blanca, según su meneo y presencia. Así que los que algo son come ella y saben y valen…Y más que, según todos decían, a tuerto y sin razón y con falsos testigos y recios tormentos la chicieron aquella vez confesar lo que no era." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 158-59.

Sabbath.[159] This would likely have sent a clear message to a *converso* audience of Rojas's inference. Throughout this text it is possible that Rojas is simply talking of the mother's status as a witch, or of arrests for other common crimes. However, his key words "persevering in sin," also lead the reader to consider the possibility that the mother's status as a witch was another way to indicate she was an outsider, an "other," a *converso*. When read in this way, it is easier to make sense of Celestina's statements that some people must suffer such things (such as public acts of reconciliation) in order to maintain their lives and honor. Judaizing *conversos* maintained their lives by publicly renouncing their faith as the dominant hierarchy demanded of them. They maintained their honor by continuing to practice their inner Jewish convictions and standing as a beacon of devotion to others and to themselves. "And so it is with those who are like her, and have the same worth, and know something like her." Celestina is speaking here of an entire class of individuals, all of whom have great worth in her eyes. These are people who "are forced to confess to being what [they are] not." Celestina's role in training the honest and naïve Pármeno might then be considered an effort to teach him the things his mother knew – how to survive with honor under difficult circumstances, but most importantly how to survive. This survival as an outsider would be based on the ability to use language to conceal and to persuade.

[159] Rawlings, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 121.

Celestina as Converso?

No matter who else shows aspects of the *converso* existence in the work, Celestina stands at the center of it all. She is the ultimate outsider who has learned to gain control and power through language. She is the go-between, the prostitute, the witch, the old hag, the merchant of unsavory devices. Before and after the expulsion, Jews were often forced to find employment in the tasks that were necessary to society, but that the "respectable" members of society were not willing to engage in, whether it was unpleasant physical labor such as tanning, or labor that Catholic teachings made socially unsavory such as banking.[160] The role of go-between, besides the power of communication that is necessary for such a profession, also fits this description in the Spain of the time – unsavory, but necessary for society. For modern audiences, the figure of the aged female matchmaker, or "*yenta*" is familiar, crossing the borders between two families to encourage a connection that in medieval times would have ultimately been about social status, security, and physical union. As will be seen in the following chapter, Jews often acted as the most trusted doctors of a community as well.[161] Additionally, many studies show that medieval Spaniards associated Jews and Muslims, the "others," with magic. Over and over again in medieval literature the practice of Judaism is

[160] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 29.
[161] R. Cerro González, "La Celestina y el arte médico," *Medicamenta* 39(1963): 166-69. Although this article does not discuss the connection of Celestina with the medical profession, it does discuss the focus on medicine and healing in the work.

connected with the practice of occult magic. Who were the witches in the imagination of medieval Spain? They were often Jews.[162]

Whether or not Rojas intended Celestina to be a *converso* or not, she exemplifies the very strongest and best (or worst) of the extremes to which *conversos* would have been driven. She is focused on immediate pleasure, not worrying about right or wrong or a hereafter. Alvaro de Montalban's desire to only worry about this life is perfectly reflected in Celestina. She is a master of manipulation. She is a magician of love, weaving spells with her words that entrap and seduce those who should have been wary of her. Indeed, Pármeno says of her, in a description of admiration and suspicion, "What a fine speech! Listen to her false flattery, brother!"[163] Pármeno can appreciate Celestina's ability to use "fine language."

Nowhere is Celestina's power to persuade across social boundaries more clear than in her conversation with Melibea's mother, Alisa, and immediately after that in her first conversation with Melibea.[164] Before visiting Melibea's home, she engages in a form of witchcraft, the preparing of an enchanted thread to help her convince Melibea. The image of a thread is appropriate.[165] It can bind two things together that were previously

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[162] J. Berunza, "Notes on Witchcraft and Alcahuetería," *Romanic Review* 19(1928): 141-50. See also J. Christoph Burgel, *The Feather of Simurgh : The "Licit Magic" of the Arts in Medieval Islam* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 9-12.

[163] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 103. Act 9. "Que palabras tiene la noble. Bien ves, hermano, estos hallagos fingidos." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 180.

[164] For a discussion of the near-magical power of Celestina's words, see Spurgeon W. Baldwin, Jr., "En Tan Pocas Palabras (Celestina, Auto IV)," *Romance Notes* 9(1967): 82-97.

[165] David T. Sisto, "The String in the Conjurations of La Celestina y Doña Bárbara," *Romance Notes* 1(1959): 150-52. This article does not discuss the importance of the imagery of the string, but simply calls attention to the string as a *motif* with a prior history in Spanish literature.

disconnected. It can entrap, ensnare, and entangle, yet it is so light and fragile that it would not cause immediate alarm or concern. If power is truly invested in the thread, then it would become a clear symbol for Celestina's hypnotic voice, which seems to cast spells as she talks. Strong objections are voiced, only to magically disappear as Celestina perseveres.[166] Strong resistance against her propositions melts away to become raging desires in support of her mission. Celestina in this scene is the magician that makes the impossible possible. She brings together two disparate elements of society – the spurned male and the haughty female (and possibly the Old and New Christian) –
so that they can have union. She is the thread between the two, through the power of her words.

On her way to the house, Celestina speaks aloud as she emphasizes the importance and power of her words. Imagining what Calisto will say to her if she fails in her mission, she speaks to herself about the magical power of her words: "'You old whore,' he'll say, 'why did you encourage me with your promises? You've got feet for everyone else; for me only a tongue. For others deeds, for me, words..... You gave me hope.'"[167] Speaking in words that any *converso* would have identified with, she says, "Evil here and evil there, trouble no matter where I turn! Well, if I must choose between

[166] See a discussion of Celestina's magical powers, although not discussing the possibility that she was a *converso*, in Félix Martí-Ibáñez, "The Medico-pharmaceutical Arts of La Celestina: a Study of a Fifteenth-Century Spanish Sorceress and Dealer in Love," *International Record of Medicine and General Practice Clinics* 169(1956): 232-49. See also Modesto Laza Palacios, *El Laboratorio de Celestina* (Málaga: Gutiérrez, 1958); Dorothy Sherman Severin, *Withcraft in Celestina* (London: Queen Mary and Westfield College, 1995).

[167] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 45-46. Act 4. "Tú, puta vieja, ¿por qué acrecentaste mis pasiones con tus promesas? Alcahueta falsa, para todo el mundo tienes pies, para mí lengua; para todos obra, para mí palabras…Que tu ofrecimiento me puso esperanza." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 115.

extremes it's better to choose the healthier."[168] With these words to herself, which reflect the decision – to choose the lesser evil – that every unwilling *converso* had to make at the time of conversion, she even gains power with herself, convincing herself to undertake the dangerous task of persuading Melibea.

When Celestina first arrives at the home, Melibea's servant Lucrecia introduces her in a revealing way. She describes her to Melibea's mother Alisa as: "That old woman… who used to live down near the tanneries… Surely you remember the time she was exposed in the stocks for a witch and for selling her girls to priests and ruining a thousand matrons?"[169] An individual who used to live by the tanneries with their strong smell and dyes, would have been known to be a Jew in medieval Europe, since this job was consistently relegated to the that society.[170] Rojas later emphasizes this fact by having Melibea repeat the same description in exactly the same words when she meets Celestina. The rest of the description that Lucrecia gives for Celestina emphasizes the destructive, subversive role she has played in society, and would have been enough to make any respectable mother shudder. She is clearly a representative of the "other" in society. Even if members of Melibea's family are considered to be *converso* "others" themselves, they would have exercised caution in meeting with someone who had so

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[168] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 46. Act 4. "¡Mal acá, mal acullá: pena en ambas partes! Cuando a los extremos falta del medio, arrimarse el hombre al más sano es discreción." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 115.

[169] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 47. Act 4. "Con aquella vieja… que solía vivir aquí en las tenerías… No sé cómo no tienes memoria de la que empicotaron por hechicera, que vendía las mozas a los abades y descasaba mil casados." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 117.

[170] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 29. Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2:190.

clearly been associated with suspicious conduct. At the same time, it is precisely these types of individuals that allow societies to survive, since they do jobs that others are not willing to undertake. Alisa invites her up assuming she has come to beg for money, but possibly also out of curiosity regarding her visit.

Celestina proceeds to tell Alisa that she has come to sell her some thread and shows her the thread, while using flattering words that compare Alisa to the beautiful, magical yarn: "[The thread] is as excellent, my lady, as I hope my old age will be! Fine as hair, strong as a fiddle string, white as snow, all spun and reeled by these fingers. Take this skein."[171] The reader can almost imagine Celestina twirling her fingers with the thread as she speaks her hypnotic words and weaves a web around Alisa. Surprisingly, in an act that has confused many scholars of *Celestina*,[172] in the very next statement Alisa abruptly announces her intentions to leave and go visit her sick sister, not even responding properly to Celestina's statement about the thread. She thereby conveniently removes herself as a barrier to Celestina's goals and a protection for Melibea, leaving her daughter completely unguarded in a supreme and unforgivable example of parental neglect. Celestina exults in the rapid transformation, attributing it (sarcastically or not) to the devil's power. The change is so sudden that it does appear the result of magic or hypnosis. Celestina has successfully exerted her power on the mother.

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[171] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 48. Act 4. "¿Tal [el hilado] señora? Tal sea mi vida y mi vejez y la de quien parte quisiere de mi jura. Delgado come el pelo de la cabeza, igual, recio como cuerdas de vihuela, blanco como el copo de la nieve, hilado todo por estos pulgares, aspado y aderezado. Veslo aquí en madejitas." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 118.

[172] Baldwin, "En Tan Pocas Palabras (Celestina, Auto IV)," 82-97.

The next obstacle for the go-between to overcome is the daughter Melibea herself. Celestina proceeds to talk and cajole, constantly flattering Melibea while at the same time showing her the magic thread:

> Oh my lovely angel, my precious pearl, and how sweetly you speak! What a joy to hear you! But don't you know what God said to the tempter, that we don´t live by bread alone?... So with your permission, I'll tell you the urgent reason for my visit. It's so urgent, indeed, that we'd both regret it if I left without telling you… Gracious and high-born lady, your gentle words and sweet face, and your generosity toward this poor old woman, give me courage to speak. I come from one who is sick unto death, from one who with a single word from your noble lips, believes he'll be cured, so greatly does he prize your courtesy… I lost my fear, my lady, when I saw how beautiful you are. I can't believe that God made some faces more perfect than others, and endowed them with more graces and lovely features, except to make them a storehouse of virtue, compassion, and mercy, ministers of His bounty, as He made yours.[173]

With these flattering words, Celestina binds Melibea gradually tighter and tighter with the magical thread of her manipulative language, telling her about the sick man (Calisto) to elicit her compassion, and then complimenting her on her virtue and mercy. She even reminds Melibea that man is not to live by bread alone, quoting a statement by Jesus[174] to identify her with the dominant society of the day and cast herself as a trustworthy authority figure, while at the same time reminding her that there is more to life than just

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[173] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 51-53. Act 4. "¡Oh angélica imagen! ¡Oh perla preciosa, y cómo te lo dices! Gozo me toma en verte hablar. ¿Y no sabes que por la divina boca fue dicho, contra aquel infernal tentador, que no de sólo pan viviremos?...Pues, si tú me das licencia, diréte la necesitada causa de mi venida, que es otra que la que hasta agora has oído y tal, que todos perderíamos en me tornar en balde sin que la sepas….¡Doncella graciosa y de alto linaje! Tu suave habla y alegre gesto, junto con el aparejo de liberalidad que muestras con esta pobre vieja, me dan osadía a te lo decir. Yo dejo un enfermo a la muerte, que con sola una palabra de tu noble boca salida… tiene por fe que sanará, según la mucha devoción tiene en tu gentileza… El temor perdí mirando, señora, tu beldad. Que no puedo creer que en balde pintaste Dios unos gestos más perfectos que otros, más dotados de gracias, más hermosas facciones, sino para hacerlos almacén de virtudes, de miserciordia, de compasón, ministros de sus mercedes y dádivas, como a ti." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 123-24.

[174] See Matthew 4:4.

surviving – life is meant to be enjoyed with love and pleasure. Nevertheless, when she first tells Melibea that she is speaking of Calisto, Melibea appears to be shocked and revolted at the idea. This leads Celestina to say to herself, "I came in an evil hour if my cantation has failed. Ho there! I know to whom I speak!"[175] She perseveres in her silver-tongued persuasion, and as Melibea continues to resist she states, "Troy was stronger, and I've tamed fiercer ones than you! No tempest lasts for long."[176]

Celestina continues on, saying that all she needs is a word of pity from Melibea, along with her belt as token of that pity. The addition of the belt, a piece of feminine clothing holding Melibea's clothing together around the waist, should have scandalized Melibea even more, yet immediately she reverses direction, much as her mother had immediately changed earlier. Melibea questions, "Well, if that was all you wanted, why didn't you say so in the first place? And then you came out with it so abruptly!"[177] Celestina responds, referring again to the power of her language, "My lady, I was so innocent that I thought you´d not suspect me of evil intentions…"[178] She then describes her errand in words that again could be reminiscent of the *converso* situation in medieval Spain, as they sought to survive by taking jobs in the service sector of society, and as they sought to please everyone in order to escape notice or anger: "My profession is to

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[175] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 54. Act 4. "En hora mala acá vine, si me falta mi conjuro? ¡Ea pues! Bien sé a quién digo. ¡Ce, hermano, que se va todo a perder." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 125.
[176] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 55. Act 4. "¡Más fuerte estaba Troya y aun otras más bravas he yo amansado! Ninguna tempestad mucho dura." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 126.
[177] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 55. Act 4. "Si eso querías, ¿por qué luego no me lo expresaste? ¿Por qué mo lo dijiste por tales palabras?" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 127.
[178] Ibid. "Señora, porque mi limpio motivo me hizo creer que, aunque en otras cualesquier lo propusiera, no se había de sospechar mal."

serve my fellows. I make my living and clothe myself by it. I never harm some in order to please others, whatever you may have heard to the contrary. In short, my lady, the wind of gossip cannot hurt the truth."[179]

In the end Melibea rapidly removes her belt, so as to have the deed done before her mother returns. She then tells Celestina that she can come visit her tomorrow to obtain a prayer of blessing, if she does it "very secretly." This secrecy leads Lucrecia to state in an aside, "There's trouble brewing! She'll give her more than she thinks!"[180] After a few more words from Celestina, Melibea even makes this suggestive promise, "I'll do more for your patient, if necessary, to alleviate his suffering."[181] The magical transformation of Melibea from stubborn object of unattainable love, to seduced maiden speaking lewd innuendos about her anticipated meeting with Calisto, is complete. Act Ten shows just how deeply Celestina's words had influenced Melibea. In that act Melibea admits to Celestina how constantly and lovingly she has thought of and desired Calisto since Celestina's first visit. The only tools that Celestina used were a bit of thread and the power of her words. In similar ways, *conversos* hoped to gain influence in a society that desired to reject them completely, and even to eventually have that society begging for their services, and willing to pay dearly for them.

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[179] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 56. Act 4. "Que no es otro mi oficio, sino servir a los semejantes: de esto vivo y de esto me arreo. Nunca fue mi voluntad enojar a unos por agradar a otros, aunque hayan dicho a tu merced en mi ausencia otra cosa. Al fin, señora, a la firme verdad el viento del vulgo no la empece." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 127.

[180] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 106. Act 4. "Fraude hay; ¡más le querrá dar, que lo dicho!" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 130.

[181] Ibid. "Más haré por tu doliente, si menester fuere, en pago de lo sufrido."

3) The Dinner – the Overturning of Christian Ideals and the Exaltation of the Material

Although this section will analyze the dinner in Act Nine, first it is important to look at a number of passages that will demonstrate the view of the Catholic church in *Celestina.* Throughout *Celestina,* Rojas constantly puts subversive words in his characters' mouths that call into question the holy status of the Catholic church and its servants. Priests used Celestina's services as a procuress at least as much as anyone else. The church is brought to the same level of deceit, greed, and lust as that of the ordinary citizens. This would have been the view of many *conversos* who were constantly persecuted by the church that had professed its love for their souls.[182] As Pármeno states:

> [Celestina] was a great friend of… priests' servants, and sold them the innocent blood of those poor girls which they had foolishly risked for the repair that she had promised them. She flew even higher and through her girls reached the most sheltered females, this on honest occasions, such as the Stations of the Cross, nocturnal processions, early Mass, and other secret devotions. I've seen many such enter her house, their faces covered, with men behind them, barefoot, penitent, muffled, their shoes unlatched, who were going there to do penance for their sins! You can't imagine the traffic she carried on.[183]

Although Rojas is here mocking the religious purity of the church, there are also a couple of interesting allusions to the Jewish situation in Spain. First, the description that she

[182] It might be argued that this could also be the view of other groups, such as reform-minded clergymen. While this argument has merit – although reformers could also be considered as a group on the margins of the dominant society – the irreverent tones of *Celestina*, as will be described in this section, do not seem to fit well with any who identified themselves with the Catholic church.

[183] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 17-18. Act 1. "Asaz era amiga de… mozos de abades; a éstos vendía ella aquella sangre incoente de las cuitadillas, la cual ligeramente aventuraban en esfurerzo de la restitución que ella les prometía. Subió su hecho a más: que por medio de aquéllas comunicaba con las más encerradas, hasta traer a ejecución so propósito, y aquéstas en tiempo honesto, como estaciones, procesiones de noche, misas del gallo, misas del alba y otras secretas devociones. Muchas encubiertas vi entrar en sus casa; tras ellas hombres descalzos, contritos y rebozados, desatacados, que entraban allí a llorar sus pecados. ¡Qué tráfagos, sis piensas, traía!" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 83.

"sold them the innocent blood of those poor girls," is a statement that could have reflected the negative stereotypes of the Jews in Spain and elsewhere in Europe. Blood libels were frequently leveled against the Jews, who were accused of using the blood of innocents for their own benefit in their religious practices.[184] Next the description of the barefoot, muffled procession of the innocents, with their shoes unlatched, going to do penance for their sins, would have been strongly reminiscent of the rites of reconciliation to which *conversos* were subject. As has been argued earlier in this study, the central target of the Inquisition at the time of Rojas's writing was the crypto-Jew, making the connection between these textual clues and the *conversos* even more likely. With these allusions, Rojas may have intended to suggest a couple of things. He may have been suggesting that even the church was infiltrated with *conversos* (as indeed it was),[185] who act one way openly while covertly engaging in other practices. Or he may have been indicating that the religious figures of the church, the dominant regime, were no better than the *conversos* whom they were persecuting.

While denigrating the church, Rojas also makes jest of those practitioners who only pretend to believe in its doctrines and practice its teachings. Celestina is the worst of the offenders, practicing a religion of greed, lust, and deception throughout, but gladly speaking of her devotion any time that it will meet her ends and protect her from reprisals. Her desire to hide her complete lack of religious devotion is so extreme that in her dying moments she even calls for a priest so that she can confess. Some scholars have

[184] Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 32-33.
[185] Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 2:212.

seen this as evidence that Rojas truly intended for Celestina to be a Christian.[186] However, considering the rest of the evidence, it is more likely that her outer, pretended Christianity is so deeply ingrained that she is able to remember to practice it even when her death is very likely, on the chance that she may recover. Or this final confession of Celestina could be still another indication of her *converso* outlook. Knowing the willingness of the Inquisition to confiscate the goods of Judaizers after their deaths, Celestina may have maintained her disguise even at this final extremity in order to maintain her material possessions for those who she hoped would inherit them. Whether or not Celestina should be seen as Jewish, her prior behaviors reveal the deceit in her final plea for confession.

On their way to the dinner that will be analyzed in this section, Sempronio and Pármeno discuss what they see as Celestina's false and mocking acts of faith. They stop to check the church in order to see if she's there praying. Sempronio states: "When [Celestina]'s got a job to do she doesn't worry about priests or piety… When she goes to church, beads in hand, it means the cupboard is bare… She uses her beads to count the number of maidenheads she's got on hand for repair, how many lovers there are in the city, how many girls she has contracted for…"[187] With these words, Sempronio is repeating an accusation that was frequently leveled against the *conversos*, that their worship was a front for false, subversive beliefs and behaviors. Accusations in the

[186] Bataillon, *La Célestine selon Fernando de Rojas*, 236.
[187] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 102. Act 9. "Cuando va a la iglesia con sus cuentas en la mano, no sobra el comer en casa… Lo que en sus cuentas reza es los virgos que tiene a cargo y cuántos enamorados hay en la ciudad y cuántas mozas tiene encomendadas…" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 179.

Inquisition included the frequent suggestion that while the Jews were praying in church, they were actually reciting their own Jewish prayers, or intoning blasphemous curses against Christianity, or chanting spells of protection for themselves and spells of cursing against their Christian neighbors.[188] It bears repeating that while hypocritical religious behaviors could be attributed to others besides Judaizing *conversos*, the strongest target of societal suspicion at the time of the writing of *Celestina*, according to Inquisition records, were crypto-Jews. Thus, while each of the connections mentioned here and elsewhere do not prove that Rojas was describing *conversos*, this interpretation seems to be the most likely explanation.

When Sempronio and Pármeno arrive at Celestina's house, a fascinating dinner ensues. Celestina sits at the head of the table, which is reminiscent of the sacramental altar of Mass. The scene parallels mock liturgies, such as the Black Sabbath, and identifies Celestina's group as part of the exploited, marginal elements of society. The cloth is removed to reveal the meal which Celestina provides, just as the cloth at Mass is removed to reveal the sacramental elements that have been provided by the priest. Throughout the meal Celestina presides as the priestess of love. This scene shows Rojas at his best, offering subversive imagery that would have been recognized by many of those antagonistic to the Catholic church, but would have likely been missed by those who revered it. Even for those who did recognize the inversion of true religion for the false religion of love, practiced at the center of the lair of the old whore – in her holy of

[188] See Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 99-100.

holies – the excuse could be given that it is only Celestina who is being blasphemous, and that it is exactly this kind of character that the entire work is warning against.[189]

The inferences to Celestina as one having religious authority are more subtle as she invites them to join her at the meal much as a priest would invite the practitioners up to the sacramental table to partake of the mass. Sempronio says to her deferentially, "You sit down first, Mother Celestina."[190] But she responds as if she were directing a ritual action with specific rules and guidelines, "After you, my sons… I hope we´ll have as much in heaven when we get there."[191] She seats each servant next to the object of his carnal desire, the prostitutes in her house. Next to her, as she is the only one who remains without a partner (reminiscent of the unmarried priest who sacrifices physical pleasures in order to serve others), she places the cup from which she states that she will pour out the wine. In another reference to the sacrament of communion, she discusses the salvific properties of wine and bread:

> [Wine] warms my blood, keeps me from falling to pieces, makes me walk cheerfully, and keeps me young. So long as my house is well supplied with it I'll never fear a lean year. With wine and a mouse-eaten crust I can keep going for three days together. It takes the sadness from the heart better than gold or coral. It gives strength to young and power to the old, gives color to the pale, and courage to the coward; it gives strength to the young and power to the old; it gives color to the pale and courage to the coward …[192]

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[189] For a fascinating discussion of this scene as a reproduction of the Catholic "carnival", in which religious authority and those controlled by it temporarily trade positions, see Terese Malachi, "'lah selestinah' me'et fernando dey rohas: 'olam vehipucho," *Bamah* 127(1991): 7-18.

[190] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 104. Act 9. "Asiéntate, madre Celestina, tú primero." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 181.

[191] Ibid. "Asentaos vosotros, mis hijos… Tanto nos diesen del paraíso, cuando allá vamos."

[192] Ibid. English text partly my translation since Simpson´s edition did not include several lines. "Esto me calienta la sangre; esto me sostiene coninuo en un ser, esto me hace andar siempre alegre; esto me para fresca; de esto vea yo sobrado en casa, que nunca temeré el mal año. Que un cortezón de pan ratonado me

During the meal, when an argument erupts between the lovers, Celestina urges it to cease, reminiscent of the injunction offered to the disciples at the Last Supper (which Christians consider as the first sacrament of communion) to "love one another."[193] Celestina states, "Children, if you love me, stop your bickering."[194] She then continues to remind of the Last Supper and of Paul's later discussion of love, offering a discourse on the power of love to overcome all other earthly desires, such as the longing for food, drink, and sleep. "Love is strong," she avers. "It breaks through all barriers."[195]

During the dinner, Celestina refers to her authority in the religion of love, putting herself in the place of the priests at mass. She states:

> They all obeyed me; they all honored and respected me… My word was law… Why, the moment I entered a church, hats would come off in my honor as if I were a duchess!... When they saw me half a league off they'd leave their prayers, and one by one and two by two they'd come running to greet me and ask whether there wasn't some little thing they could do for me, and each would ask me about his girl. Some, even while they were saying Mass, seeing me come in, would get so flustered that they'd say everything wrong. Some called me "mistress"; others; "aunt"; others "sweetheart"; others "honest old woman."… There they'd offer me money or gifts, or they'd kiss the hem of my gown or my cheek, to keep me happy.[196]

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basta para tres días. Esto quita la tristeza del corazón, más que el oro ni el coral; esto da esfuerzo al mozo y al viejo fuerza, pone color al descolorido, coraje al cobarde, al flojo diligencia…"

[193] See John 15:12. "This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you."

[194] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 106. Act 9. "Hijos, por mi vida, que cesen esas razones de enojo." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 184.

[195] Ibid. "Mucha fuerza tiene el amor; no solo la tierra aun las mares traspasa, según su poder." See John 15:9-19 and 1 Corinthians 13.

[196] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 110. Act 9. "Todas me obedecían, todas me honraban… Lo que yo decía era lo bueno… En entrando por la iglesia veía derrocar bonetes en mi honor, como si yo fuera una duquesa… Por media legua que me viesen, dejaban las Horas. Uno a uno, dos a dos, venían a donde yo estabe a ver si mandaba algo, a pregunatrme cada uno por la suya. Que hombre había, que estando diciendo misa, en viéndome entrar, se turbaban, que no hacían ni decían cosa a derechas. Unos me llamaban señora, otros tía, otros enamorada, otros vieja honrada…Allí se me ofrecían dineros, allí promesas, allí otras dádivas, besando el cabo de mi manto y aun algunos en la cara, por me tener más conenta." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 189-90.

Celestina claims that she was given the same honors as the priests, even to the kissing of the hem of her gown. When she was present, Christian worship was displaced by the worshippers' true devotion to illicit love. She goes even further, claiming:

> As soon as they received their share of the holy tithes, they ran to enter it in my book, so that I and their sweethearts could eat… And there were some poor priests without benefices who brought me votive offerings from the altars. As soon as their last parishioners had kissed their stoles they were off to my house with the first flight.[197]

Even the priests did obeisance to her, offering her the tithes that were reserved for the church and its magistrates, and the offerings that were meant for God. Celestina had become the god(dess) of love. In this view the power of physical, carnal love trumped the power of the church. Just as with Alvaro de Montalban, the earthly was more powerful than the hope of any future blessings. Celestina even had her own book, like the book of life, that contained the names and offerings of those who had come to worship at her altar of joy. As Sempronio had referred to her, she had become a type of holy mother, bent with age and with her carnal arts, in place of the young Holy Mother of the church. Like the Virgin herself, she worked miracles and brought communion in the sweet nectar of love for any who would come to worship, even restoring the virginity of those who had lost it, and altering the outward appearance and inner desires of those who craved her beneficence as if by miraculous bestowals of grace.

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[197] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 111. Act 9. "Cada cual, como lo recibía de aquellos diezmos de Dios, así lo venían luego a registrar, para que comiese yo y aquellas sus devotas… Pues otros curas sin renta, no era ofrecido el bodigo, cuando, en basando el feligrés laestola, era del primero voleo en mis casa." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 180.

In a different passage from another act, rather than calling her the holy mother, Pármeno exalts her regular title, that of "old whore":

> That's her proper title and the one she goes by. If she's among a hundred women and someone says "Old Whore!" with no embarrassment whatever she turns her head and answers with smiling face… If she walks among dogs, that's the name they bark. If it's birds they sing nothing else. If it's a flock of sheep, they bleat her name. If it's asses, they bray "Old Whore!" The very frogs in their puddles croak it. If she passes a smithy, the smiths' hammers pound it out… When gamblers lose at the gaming table, then you should hear her praises ring forth! All things that make a noise, wherever she is, proclaim her... What else would you know, save that when one stone strikes against another, they cry "Old Whore!"[198]

This passage indicates a true reversal of religious values. Celestina's earthy title has become the name that is upon everyone's lips, even the name that is used to curse and blaspheme, instead of the name of God. Any Christian of the time would have been aware of the biblical archetype of evil, carnal desire, known in the Book of Revelation as "the great whore,"[199] that fights against God and seeks to overcome the church. In this case, the whore is set up as god. During his triumphal entry into Jerusalem, as all proclaimed him as the Messiah, and his name was on every tongue, Jesus stated that even if these worshippers held silent the very stones themselves would cry out in worship.[200] Rojas blasphemously accords Celestina the same privilege, that of the god of love, which even the very rocks proclaim, in place of the Christian Messiah of love. This was the

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[198] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 16-17. Act 1. "Y de más, de esto es nombrada y por tal título conocida. Si entre cient mujeres va y alguno dice: ¡Puta vieja!, sin ningún empacho luego vuelve la cabeza y responde con alegre cara… Si pasa por los perros, aquello suena su ladrido; si está cerca las aves, otra cosa no cantan; si cerca los ganados, balando lo pregonan; si cerca las bestias, rebuznando dicen: ¡Puta vieja!; las ranas de los charcos otra cosa no suelen mentar. Si va entre los herreros, aquello dicen sus martillos… Al perder en los tableros, luego suenan sus loores. Todas cosas que son hacen, el tal nombre representan… ¿Qué quieres más? Sino que, si una piedra topa con otra, luego suena ¡Puta vieja!" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 82.

[199] See Revelation 19:1.

[200] See Luke 19:40.

world that many *conversos* of the time would have seen, a world devoted to the acquisition of earthly experiences, in which religious practice was only useful as a means to that end. In this world, carnal love and all the material desires of physical life and material possession that it represented had become the only true religion. On the other hand, Rojas cleverly spoke in his role as literary go-between to his Christian audience as well. Pármeno's description of Celestina as the old whore could also be taken as a sarcastic insult, repeatedly calling the evil woman by the worst name possible. If Rojas's work was taken to be a warning against the results of sin and fornication, then those who understood it in this way may have been able to see confirmation in this description.

4) Pleberio's Lament on Love – the Power and Deception of Love

Before analyzing Pleberio's lament, it is important to use various quotations from elsewhere in the work to discuss the focus on love found in *Celestina*. Many scholars who have studied *Celestina* have noted the central role that love plays.[201] In the work, love appears to be the only attribute or possession that has any true, intrinsic value. All else is false in the end, but – besides the brief joy that comes to Celestina when given her golden chain – love is the only attribute or possession that has power to truly move the heart and provide ecstasy. This is not surprising considering the focus of the times. Both in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance, as has been noted, love was a central focus of longing and attention. Rojas was certainly not the only author to set love up as an object

[201] For example, see Berndt, *Amor, Muerte, y Fortuna en "La Celestina"*, 8-15; Peter E. Russell, *Temas de la Celestina y Otros Estudios* (Barcelona: Ariel, 1978), 323-40.

of worship. Scholars have indicated various reasons for this focus, some focusing on the connection between love and magic,[202] some on the outlines of courtly love,[203] and others on the concept of love in the Renaissance.[204]

Although it was not uncommon for love to take a central role in medieval works in Spain, and for women to be adored to the point of worship, this expression of worship of a female or of the attribute of carnal love would have been considered blasphemous in the Spain of Rojas's time.[205] When the Inquisition finally had its way with the book, these types of statements were blacked out before the book could go back on sale.[206] Such blasphemous statements are mostly offered by Calisto, as in this conversation with Sempronio:

> Sempronio: I was saying, God forbid!, for what you've just said is a kind of heresy.
> Calisto: Why?
> Sempronio: Because what you said contradicts the Christian religion.`
> Calisto: Ah! Never mind!
> Sempronio: Are you not a Christian?
> Calisto: Me? I am Melibean! I worship Melibea, I believe in Melibea, I love Melibea…. What fault in me are you reproving?
> Sempronio: That you're submitting your man's dignity to the frailty of a woman.
> Calisto: A woman, you clod? A goddess.
> Sempronio: Do you really believe that or are you making game of me?
> Calisto: Making game of you? I believe in her as I believe in God, and I say there's no higher sovereign in heaven, although she resides among us here on earth.[207]

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[202] Severin, *Withcraft in Celestina*, 38-43.
[203] Aguirre, *Calisto y Melibea: Amantes Cortesanos*.
[204] Pattison, "Is Celestina a Medieval Work?," 114-20.
[205] Figueira, *Plenitude of Power: The Doctrine and Exercise of Authority in the Middle Ages*, 98-99.
[206] Green, "The *Celestina* and the Inquisition," 214-15.
[207] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 5-6. Act 1. "Sem: Digo que nunca Dios quiera tal; que es especie de herejía lo que agora dijiste. Cal: ¿Por qué? Sem: Porque lo que dices contradice la crisitiana religión. Cal: ¿Qué a mí? Sem: ¿Tú no eres cristiano? Cal: ¿Yo? Melibeo soy y a Melibea adoro y en Melibea creo y a Melibea

Instead of worshipping the Christian savior, Calisto has chosen to give his devotion to the earthly, carnal object of Melibea. Interestingly, his goal is to experience physical union with her, whereas Catholic doctrine teaches that the Christian can enjoy spiritual union with the Lord through the physical experience of the Catholic sacrament of communion. Thus Calisto has traded a heavenly communion for an inverted worldly one. Even Sempronio can recognize this heresy. However, his rebuke should not be taken too seriously, as Sempronio shows multiple times that he is willing to blaspheme and ignore Christian precepts as much as any man. Calisto blatantly avers his worship of Melibea several times, even stating that there is no power higher than she, although she has descended to earth to reside among men, much as Catholic doctrine taught that God had done in the form of Jesus.[208]

However, notwithstanding the power of love that Rojas consistently proclaimed throughout his work, he shows that this type of love can disappoint and betray. While some scholars have seen the enthroning of illicit love as evidence that Rojas was creating a subversive work,[209] others have pointed to the negative results of love, and to the final lament of Pleberio regarding love in order to show that Rojas was in reality seeking to

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amo... ¿Qué me repruebas? Sem: Que sometes la dignidad del hombre a la imperfección de la flaca mujer. Cal: ¿Mujer? ¡Oh grosero! ¡Dios, Dios!"" Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 70-71.

[208] Meister, *Christian Thought: A Historical Introduction*, 17-19.

[209] Castro, *La Celestina como Contienda Literaria: Castas y Casticismos*, 75-82; Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 120-23; Charles F. Fraker, "The Importance of Pleberio's Soliloquy," *Romanische Forschungen* 78(1966): 515-29; D. W. McPheeters, "The Element of Fatality in the Tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea," *Symposium* 8(1954): 331-35. Although many have analyzed Pleberio's lament, none have analyzed it in relation to the Jewish and Christian theological concepts of love.

warn against the kinds of excesses to which Calisto allowed his heart to rise.[210] Indeed, because of its length and position at the end of the work, Pleberio's lament has possibly occasioned more critical commentary than any other portion of the work.[211]

It is truly challenging – as it should be in a work shrouded in subterfuge and double talk which seeks to please multiple audiences – to determine from the work whether romantic, physical love is in reality being extolled or condemned. At times it seems clear that Rojas was expending his greatest and most fervent efforts in order to rejoice in the power of love. Other times, such as in the final lament of Pleberio, he seems to emphasize the fact that love betrays all, sending them to their fated deaths. Death comes over and over again to those who succumb to material and physical pleasure (although, as mentioned above, it also comes to those such as Calisto who act with some concern for others). Celestina, Calisto, Melibea, Sempronio, and Pármeno – all who have dipped their hearts and minds in devotion to love and material things are punished. Death is almost as pervasive a theme in the work as is love.[212]

Love is capricious and hard to predict, but no more so than the *converso* experience with the unpredictable God that they had first served as Jews, or the God that they had later encountered as Christians. Whether extolling or warning of love, Pleberio's

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[210] See J. A. Flightner, "Pleberio," *Hispania* 48(1964): 484-92; Schiell, "A Theological Interpretation of *La Celestina*".

[211] An entertaining debate between Peter N. Dunn – who avers that Pleberio's lament has to be connected to the rest of Pleberio's characterization in the play and cannot be interpreted as Rojas's *converso* angst – and Stephen Gilman – who claims the opposite – can be found in Peter N. Dunn, "Pleberio's World," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 91(1976): 406-19; Stephen Gilman and Peter N. Dunn, "Pleberio's World: To the Editor," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 92(1977): 130-32.

[212] Berndt, *Amor, Muerte, y Fortuna en "La Celestina"*, 36-39.

final lament continues to completely ignore God as a power in the universe, and instead places love in that place. Remembering that Pleberio, the father of Melibea, may have been constructed by Rojas as a *converso* makes this fact even more pertinent to the discussion.

In this section, I will add an additional interpretation to others offered regarding the role of love in the work. Yovel has discussed the importance that words such as "hope" (*esperanza*) and "salvation" (*salvación*) would have had for a Christian and a Jewish audience.[213] However, he and others have ignored the power of the word "love" (*amor*) in both Christianity and Judaism. While it is true that love in *Celestina* often refers to *eros*, or romantic love, it is also true that both religions had love (*amor*), including *eros*, of some sort or other at the center of their religious beliefs.

Following the usage frequently found in biblical texts such as the Song of Songs,[214] Jewish tradition throughout the ages, along with many other religious traditions used the symbol of love – even romantic, physical love[215] – to represent the longing of mankind for the divine. This theme would continue in crescendo through Jewish literature, reaching a climax in the works of mystical Judaism, which often used the language of physical love and romantic, physical union to speak of union with the

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213 Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 97-99.

214 Jacob Neusner, *Israel's Love Affair with God* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1993), iii-vii. See also Leo Jung, "Knowledge and Love in Rabbinic Lore," in *Studies in Torah Judaism*, ed. Leon d. Stitskin (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1969), 475-84.

215 Ari Elon, "Torah as Love Goddess," in *Essential Papers on the Talmud*, ed. Michael Chernick (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 420-28.

divine.[216] In the biblical book of Hosea, God is seen as a tenderly loving spouse, who has rejected Israel as his partner for a time, but who will tenderly call her back into the marriage covenant. The bonds of marriage and love are seen here as representing the Jews' status as the chosen people of God.[217]

On the other hand, illicit love was used in biblical and Jewish literature just as frequently to represent the wandering devotions of the Jews. Love of strange women is frequently warned against in the Hebrew bible because this love will draw the heart away from the true God.[218] Worship of idols or other false religious practices were described clearly in biblical texts as whoredoms – illicit relationships that would only damage those who engaged in them because they would break their covenants with God.[219] In his thirteenth-century *Tahkemoni*, Judah al-Harizi stated that his work was intended to help the Jews return from their love of Arabic language and culture, which he portrayed as an adulterous, seductive woman.[220] In the minds of many medieval Jews, those who converted to Christianity were guilty of this type of adulterous transgression, particularly in moving to a religion that put so much emphasis on the veneration of the saints – seen by traditional Jews as idol worship – and a religion that by many Jews was considered to

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[216] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 7-14.

[217] Choon L. Seow, "Hosea, Book of," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:291-97.

[218] See, for one of many examples: Deuteronomy 7:3-4. See also Esther Fuchs, "Intermarriage, Gender, and Nation in the Hebrew Bible," in *The Passionate Torah: Sex and Judaism*, ed. Danya Ruttenberg (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 94-99.

[219] Seow, "Hosea, Book of," 294-97; Bruce Chilton, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 211-17.

[220] Judah ben Solomon al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain*, trans. David Simha Segal (Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2001), 11. See also the discussion in chapter 5 and Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's "Tratado de Melibea y Calisto": A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the Celestina in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," 345-46.

worship multiple gods because of its focus on God as the trinity of father, son, and spirit.[221] Any Jew in medieval times, including *conversos* in Rojas's time who had maintained a connection with their prior beliefs, would have recognized in any reference to love, multiple religious allusions to love in Judaism.[222] Those *conversos* who remained faithful to their Jewish traditions would certainly have connected illicit love with the corrosive taint of Christianity that affected all who truly bowed themselves down to this idolatrous religion.

The praise of love was no less important in Christianity. In fact, more than any other description, Jesus was portrayed as a God of love, in contrast to the angry God of justice and punishment that Christians connected with the Jewish or Muslim concepts of God. According to Christian theology, to be Christian was to love others, to practice mercy and forgiveness at all times, to love one's enemy and pray for those who treated you despitefully.[223] This was the Christianity that had been preached to the Jews, a religion that would accept them with open arms and allow them full access to all of the spiritual and temporal blessings of the Christian world.[224]

It might be said that many *conversos* had been seduced by the promise of love into another relationship, much as Melibea had been. As has been shown, at the time of

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[221] Chilton, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies*, 215-19; Yovel, *Spinoza and Other Heretics*, 100.
[222] Theodore L. Steinberg, *Jews and Judaism in the Middle Ages* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger Publishers, 2008), 62-64.
[223] Meister, *Christian Thought: A Historical Introduction*, 74-77; Chilton, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies*, 221-22; Richard Smoley, *Conscious Love: Insights from Christianity* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 23-28.
[224] Neusner and Chilton, *Jewish-Christian Debates: God, Kingdom, Messiah*, 149-51; Armstrong, *The Battle for God*, 19.

their conversion many of these *conversos* permanently rejected the Jewish image of love. Their existence as part of the covenant of Israel had offered them only pain. It had betrayed them and they were thoroughly disillusioned by it, and were at the same time enthralled by what seemed to be the true rewards of love in a Christian society. However, upon accepting the promises of Christianity and receiving the Christian sacrament of baptism, they discovered that these promises of love were just as deceitful as those that they had left behind. Nowhere in Christianity did they find true compassion, forgiveness, acceptance, or communion. Everywhere they saw envy, greed, and materialism, and subterfuge, covered with a thin veneer of religious spirituality.[225]

As has been described, the *converso* experience was varied and complex, but Rojas's description of the joys and betrayals of love would have spoken to all *conversos* in somewhat different ways – the *converso* who was truly converted to Christianity could have seen love's betrayal as typifying the false Jewish promise of covenantal love; the Judaizing *converso* may have seen it as emblematic of the false promises of Christianity; and the *converso* who had rejected both would have seen its false promises everywhere in society. All that remained for this *converso* was to pursue earthly love and carnal pleasures, amassing as much of material goods as possible.

It is with these interpretations of love, rich with the multiple religious allusions that would have been almost second-nature to Jews and Christians of the time, that Pleberio's lament becomes the most pointed. In the following lines, I will emphasize the

[225] Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 1:86-88; Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain*, 48-52.

interpretation of love as the false promises of the dominant regime, of the Christian society that had inflicted its gaze upon the converted Jew through the power of the Inquisition. After Melibea's suicide, Pleberio attacks the world that has betrayed him – which can be seen as the world of the *converso* amid the society of Christians – with vehemence:

> O life full of troubles and misery! O world, world! Many men have said many things of you, many have inveighed against you for your deceits. They have said many things of you by hearsay, but I will speak from the sad experience of one whose sales and purchases at your deceptive fair have not gone well, of one who has long concealed your double-dealing for fear of arousing your wrath by my hatred, so that you should not prematurely wither this flower that has today fallen into your grasp. But now I am not afraid, for I have nothing more to lose… Now that I have seen the pro and contra of your dealings, I find in you only a maze of error, a frightful desert, a den of wild beasts, a game in which men go round in circles, a lake full of mud, a country choked with thorns, a high mountain, a stony meadow, a field swarming with snakes, an orchard all blossom and no fruit, a fountain of cares, a river of tears, a sea of miseries, labor without profit, sweet poison, vain hope, false joy, and real sorrow. Feed us, false world, with the food of your delights, and in the tastiest morsel we find the hook. We cannot escape it for it has ensnared our wills. You promise much but perform nothing. You throw us from you so that we shall not beg you to keep your empty promises. Carelessly and thoughtlessly we run in the meadows of your rank vices, and you show us the trap when we have no chance of turning back.[226]

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[226] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 159-60. Act 21. "¡Oh vida de congojas llena, de miserias acompañada!; ¡oh mundo, mundo! Muchos mucho de ti dijeron, muchos en tus cualidades metieron la mano, a diversas cosas por oídas te compararon; yo por triste experiencia lo contaré, comoa quien las ventas y compras de tu engañosa feria no prósperamente sucedieron, como aquel que mucho ha hasta agora callado tus falsas propiedades, por no encender con odio tu ira, porque no me secases sin tiempo esta flor que este día echaste de tu poder. Pues agora sin temor, como quien no tiene qué perder…Agora, visto el pro y la contra de tus bienandanzas, me pareces un laberinto de errores, un desierto espantable, una morada de fieras, juego de hombres que andan en corro, laguna llena de cieno, región llena de espinas, monte alto, campo pedregoso, prado lleno de serpientes, huerto florido y sin fruto, fuente de cuidados, río de lágrimas, mar de miserias, trabajo sin provecho, dulce ponzoña, vana esperanza, falsa alegría, verdadero dolor. Cébasnos, mundo falso, con el manjar de tus deleites, al mejore sabor nos descubres el anzuelo; no lo podemos huir, que nos tiene ya cazadas las voluntades. Prometes mucho, nada no cumples; échasnos de ti porque no te podamos pedir que mantegas tus vanos prometimientos. Corremos por los prados de tus viciosos vicios, muy descuidados, a rienda suelta; descúbresnos la celada, cuando ya no hay lugar de volver." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 278-79.

Although it is certainly not the only way to interpret Pleberio's lament – Yovel, for example appropriately sees it as an example of a non-Christian worldview that ignores any order, such as the worldview of the prologue analyzed in this study, while some others see it simply as a diatribe against romantic love – viewed in the light of the *converso* feeling towards Christianity and the condition of the New Christian during the time of the Inquisition, Pleberio's words take on a powerful tone of *converso* despair. The *converso* has received promises from his new world, but finds that all was a betrayal. He finds his new world to be a meadow that is beautiful to look on but that offers no real food or sustenance. Its beauty is patently evil because it simply serves to seduce the unwary victim into its grasp. There was sweetness in the taste of the promises, but those promises concealed a dangerous hook. It was worth it to Pleberio to try to succeed in this world in order to preserve his daughter's well-being and provide her with opportunities that he himself did not have – so that love would "not prematurely wither this flower that has today fallen into its grasp" – but now that she is gone, his motivation is destroyed. He had not spoken of love's "double-dealing" in order to avoid its "wrath." Under the gaze of the Inquisition, this was the only intelligent behavior. However, now that love had destroyed him notwithstanding his cautions, his motivation was gone. This is the world of conflict, completely devoid of order, that Rojas discussed in his prologue. Again, Rojas avoids any mention of Christian names in this lament. He refers to Greek and Latin examples of those betrayed by love with regularity, and even mentions Jewish stories such as that of David and Bathsheba, but he avoids any reference to Christianity.

After decrying the awful rewards of living in such a world, he becomes even more pointed in his discussion of the results of accepting love as a guiding value. If his words are interpreted in terms of the enticing promises of love and acceptance used to draw Jews into the Christian faith, they again take on clear undertones of additional bitterness:

> But what forced my daughter to slay herself was the mighty power of love… How can you expect me to remain alive, now that I know the tricks and snares, the chains and nets, in which you capture our weak wills?... O love, love, I did not think you had the strength and power to kill your victims. You wounded me in my youth, *but I survived your fires*. Why did you let me go, only to pay me out for my escape in my old age? I thought myself free from your snares when I came to the age of forty and was happy in my wife's company and in the fruit of our union that you have plucked today. I did not think you would visit *your spite against the fathers upon the children*, or know that you could wound with the sword and *burn with fire*. You leave the clothes untouched but wound the heart. You make me love the ugly and think it beautiful. Who gave you such power? Who gave you so unsuitable a name?... They have given you a sweet name, but you perform bitter deeds, and you do not give equal rewards. The law is wicked that is not fair to all… Happy are those whom you have never known or never noticed. Some, induced by an error of the sense, have called you a god. But it is a strange god that kills its own children, as you kill your followers. In defiance of all reason, you give the richest gifts to those who serve you least, so that in the end you may draw them into your painful dance… It is your ministers that are blind, for they never feel or see how harsh is the reward you give to those who serve you. *Your fire is a burning flash that leaves no mark where it strikes. Its flames are fed with the souls and lives of human beings, so numberless that if I tried to count them I do not know where I should begin.* Not only of Christians, but of pagans and Jews; and all in requital for their worship of you.[227]

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[227] Simpson, ed. *The Celestina*, 161-62. Act 21. "Pero ¿quién forzó a mi hija morir, sino la fuerte fuerza de amor?... ¿Cómo me mandas quedar en ti, conociendo tus falsías, tus lazos, tus cadenas y redes, con que pescas nuestras flacas voluntades?...¡Oh amor, amor, que no pensé que tenías fuerza ni poder de mater a tus sujetos! Herida fue de ti mi junentud, por medio de tus brasas pasé. ¿Cómo me soltaste, para me dar la paga de la huida en mi vejez? Bien pensé que de tus lazos me había librado cuando los cuarenta años toqué, cuando fui contento con mi conyugal compañera, cuando me vi con el fruto que me cortaste el día de hoy. No pensé que tomabas en los hijos la venganza de los padres. Ni sé si hieres con hierro, ni si quemas con fuego. Sana dejas la ropa, lastimas el corazón. Haces que feo amen y hermoso les parezca. ¿Quién te dio tanto poder? ¿Quién te puso nombre que no te conviene?...Dulce nombre te dieron; amargos hechos haces. No das iguales galardones. Inicua es la ley que a todos igual no es… Bienaventurados los que no conociste o de los que no te curaste. Dios te llamaron otros, no sé con qué error de tu sentido traídos. Cata que Dios mata los que crió; tú matas los que te siguen. Enemigo de toda razón, a los que menos te sirven das

Pleberio's' multiple mentions of the fires that have taken lives are again reminiscent of the fires of the Inquisition. This was a generation for whom the Inquisition was at its most violent,[228] and all were aware of the numerous deaths that it had occasioned. Pleberio mentions that he thought that he had escaped the dangers of love after he was married and had children. Indeed, this was the hope of all *conversos*, that if they simply settled down and lived the life that the dominant regime expected, they would be allowed a peaceful existence. Although their lives would be difficult, they hoped that the existence they were building would allow their children to live free from taint. But Pleberio is dismayed, as were the *conversos*, to find that the taint was undiminished. The fire that had threatened him in his younger years (much as the Inquisition fires may have affected Rojas in his youth) reached out in his older years to snatch his children as well. The phrase in which Pleberio states that love visits its "spite against the fathers upon the children" is precisely reminiscent of the Christian teaching that the sins of the Jewish ancestors who killed Jesus would be visited upon their children and descendants unto the last generation (until they rejected their false faith.)[229] His mention of an unfair "law" is instructive. The prevailing laws of Christianity allowed those who most attempted to

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mayores dones, hasta tenerlos metidos en to congojosadanza…Más ciegos son tus ministros, que jamás sienten ni ven el desabrido galardón que sacan de tu servicio. Tu fuego es de ardiente rayo, que jamás hace señal do llega. La leña que gasta tu llama son almas y vidas de humanas criaturas, las cuales son tantas, que de quien comenzar pueda, apenas me ocurre. No sólo de cristianso, mas de gentiles y judíos y todo en pago de buenos servicios." Sánchez-Cascado, ed., *La Celestina*, 281-82.

[228] Kamen, *The Spanish Inquisition*, 180-82.

[229] Roberto Rusconi, "Anti-Jewish Preaching in the Fifteenth Century," in *Friars and Jews in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Steven J. McMichael and Susan E. Myers (Boston: Brill, 2004), 240-42. See Exodus 20:5.

follow them to be called into question, whereas the lazy, half-hearted devotion of the Old Christian was rewarded without question.

If Rojas were not trying to reach a *converso* audience, and if he were not at least on some level speaking of religious promises and betrayals here, I argue that the last line quoted above – referring to Christians, pagans, and Jews – would never have been placed in the mouth of Pleberio. If he was only speaking of worldly love, why would he bother mentioning that Jews – who theoretically no longer existed in Rojas's Spain -- are touched by it, comparing them to Christians (who often were also falsely accused for the profit of another)? This sentence overtly introduces the theme of religion into the dialogue. Either Pleberio is emphasizing that all religious outlooks – Christian, pagan, and Jewish – are affected by the betrayals provided in the Christian world, or he may have been claiming that every *converso* outlook – whether truly converted to Christianity, whether maintaining Jewish beliefs and attachments, or whether rejecting both – will in the end be punished. While Pleberio's bitter diatribe against love can legitimately be interpreted as a dire warning against the betrayals of illicit love, as those scholars who see *Celestina* as a moralizing work aver, its message becomes even more poignant and rich when the possibility of its religious undertones are revealed.

Interestingly, more than any other interpretation of Pleberio's lament that has previously been offered, this interpretation successfully connects Rojas's introductory poem in which he warns against love; with the prologue in which he describes a world of conflict; with the hedonistic, subversive dialogue of the work in which he seems to

rejoice in love; and finally with the words of Pleberio. If Rojas from the beginning intended the word "love" to serve as a mask for "Christianity," or for the false promises of religion, then his work was clearly subversive throughout, and difficulties with varying messages and viewpoints is almost completely resolved.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER TWO

Although he gave more than sufficient clues of his subversive intent, Rojas maintained his masterful subterfuge to the end, always leaving the reader with some doubt as to exactly what he was trying to say with his work. All readers can find what they are looking for in *Celestina.* When he renamed it as the Tragi-comedy, he played a final joke upon his audience. Which is it? A tragedy, a comedy, or both? A lesson against vice, or a story extolling materialism and romantic love as the only real values? Rojas provided something for everyone. There are recognizable medieval forms of courtly love and pithy allusions on almost every page, but the fervor, skepticism, love of language, and ambivalence of the storyline (unless those seeing didactic, moralizing intent are to be believed) are clearly drawing the readers toward the Renaissance. In Rojas's introduction there is clear deference to the Catholic religious norms of the time, as well as traditional Jewish morals that would also have warned against immorality in every form. On the other hand, there is a rejoicing in hedonism, and a call to *carpe diem*, to live for the present, that pervades the book with such power and seductive force that it cannot be ignored. There is material here for the Old Christian in all her forms, and for the New Christian in all his varieties. Rojas was truly a go-between among all of these groups and

factions. He knew his audiences well and played to them. As Foucault maintains, his discourse was defined in relation to the ideology of the dominant hierarchy. However, he used the power of language to speak in ways that his covert *converso* society would have recognized, but which were masked from the gaze of Christian society. Through it all, love is the moving force -- most likely in all of its meanings -- that gave life and vitality to his work.

Chapter 3 – Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati and His World

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will introduce Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, the first translator of Rojas's work into Hebrew, and the only Hebrew translator of *Celestina* until the twentieth century. I will describe Tsarfati's historical niche in Italy, presenting the situation of the Jewish community in Italy and showing the cultural milieu from which Tsarfati's works arose. Tsarfati's own history will be tied in to the general history of litterateurs and of Jews in Italy. The last portion of the chapter will analyze two modern works that employ Tsarfati as a literary figure. The way in which modern authors viewed and portrayed Tsarfati will be connected with Tsarfati's historical background. As with Rojas, I will argue that Tsarfati served as a go-between for the Jewish and Christian communities where he lived, and that he was a transitionary figure between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. I will demonstrate that modern Jewish authors have also recognized these qualities in Tsarfati.

Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati (d. 1527) was one of the best-known Italian, Jewish figures of his time. He came from a famous family, excelled in the poetic arts of the Renaissance, and walked in circles of influence, both in the Christian and Jewish communities. This circle of influence included such luminaries as Pope Clement VII, others of the renowned de' Medici family, and the famous Messianic claimant David Hareuveni. Notwithstanding the prestige that Tsarfati held, the twists and turns of history and the course of his life led to a death in tragic obscurity, as at times has occurred with

other famous poets and artists – el Greco, Edgar Allen Poe, Emily Dickinson, and Vincent van Gogh, to name only a few. However, unlike these artists, Tsarfati has yet to become well-known as a historical figure or as an artist.

In contrast to the enormous quantities of scholarly work produced on the life and work and Fernando de Rojas – notwithstanding the existence of only one work to Rojas's name – the life and works of Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati have been largely overlooked by modern audiences. Although Tsarfati is mentioned in most (but not all) Jewish encyclopedias, he receives only a brief paragraph or two in each of them, and these paragraphs mostly review his life's work as it related to his connection with the Christian culture of Italy.[230] Similar treatment of Tsarfati can be found in the works about Italian literature from the Renaissance. Either Tsarfati receives no attention at all, or he receives brief mention in only two or three sentences.[231] Tsarfati is afforded slightly more mention in work on Jews in the Renaissance or Jewish literature in Italy, as might be expected,[232] and his work receives strong praise from some of these scholars. Shalom Spiegel, for example, in a chapter on medieval Hebrew poetry, refers to Tsarfati as "the

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[230] "Tzarfati," in *The Standard Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Cecil Roth (New York: Doubleday, 1959), 849; "Joseph ben Samuel Zarfati," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isidore Singer (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), 12:637; Moritz Freier, "Zarfati," in *The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia*, ed. Isaac Landman (New York: The Universal Jewish Encyclopedia, Inc., 1943), 10:629-30; Renato Spiegel, "Sarfati," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Thomson Gale, 2007), 18:54-55.

[231] See, for example Hermann Vogelstein, *Rome*, trans. Moses Hadas (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1940).

[232] See Paul Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom* (Berlin: Mayer & Muller, 1895); Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*; ———, *The Jews in the Renaissance*; Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance*; Robert Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Anthony Oldcorn (Berkely, California: University of California Press, 1994); Anna Foa, "Converts and *Conversos* in Sixteenth-Century Italy: Marranos in Rome," in *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman and Barbara Garvin (Potomac: University Press of Maryland, 2000).

most engaging poet of the Italian Renaissance."[233] However, these scholars again devote no more than a paragraph or two to his work and accomplishments before moving on to other subjects. Spiegel, who was limited to only one chapter on Hebrew poetry, understandably offered only three sentences on Tsarfati.

The work of Tsarfati which has received the most scholarly attention is the introduction to his Hebrew translation of *Celestina*. This introductory poem is the only portion remaining of Tsarfati's translation. Several scholarly articles have been written on this poem, analyzing its connection to *Celestina* and its relationship with other Jewish literary precursors.[234] Thus, Tsarfati seems to have only merited attention in the eyes of many scholars as a side-interest to the famous *Celestina*. Although this study also focuses on Tsarfati's connection with Rojas, I will devote the next two chapters to Tsarfati's life and works in general. Indeed, Tsarfati's works deserve attention in their own right, and not simply as a satellite to *Celestina*.

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[233] Shalom Spiegel, "On Medieval Hebrew Poetry," in *The Jews: Their Religion and Culture*, ed. Louis Finkelstein (New York: Schocken Books, 1949), 109.

[234] These are Cassuto, "mishirey yosef ben shemuel tsarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit," 121-28; D. W. McPheeters, "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI," in *Homenaje a Rodríguez-Moñino. Estudios de erudición que le ofrecen sus amigos o discípulos hispanistas norteamericanos* (Madrid: Castalia, 1966), 399-411; Almagor, "hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," 19-28; Dwayne E. Carpenter, "The Sacred in the Profane: Jewish Scriptures and the First Comedy in Hebrew," in *Fernando de Rojas and Celestina: Approaching the Fifth Centenary*, ed. Ivy A. Corfis and Joseph Thomas Snow (Madison: Hispanic Seminary of Medieval Studies, 1993), 229-36; Carpenter, "A *Converso* Best-Seller: *Celestina* and her Foreign Offspring," 267-81; Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's "Tratado de Melibea y Calisto": A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the Celestina in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," 329-47.

Three scholars who have given more attention to the general works of Tsarfati are Umberto Cassuto,[235] Hayyim Schirmann, and Dan Almagor. In 1934 Schirmann provided several poems by Tsarfati in his anthology of Hebrew poetry from Italy,[236] although the nature of this work meant that these poems were simply reproduced, and did not receive any scholarly analysis. Among scholars who have devoted effort to the works of Tsarfati, Dan Almagor stands at the forefront. Although his master's thesis, providing a critical edition of all of Tsarfati's poems, is currently unavailable for scholarly perusal, Almagor has published a comprehensive bibliography of all modern scholarship referring to Tsarfati up until the year 1996.[237] In addition, Almagor has published newspaper and journal articles in Hebrew discussing a little more than half of Tsarfati's two hundred and thirty Hebrew poems.[238] Almagor's work has thereby effectively begun the process of bringing Tsarfati's poetry to light for modern, Hebrew-speaking audiences. The task of bringing Tsarfati's poems to light for non-Hebrew-speaking audiences remains to other, future studies, such as this one.

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235 Umberto Cassuto, "Some Poems of Joseph Sarfati," in *Occident and Orient: Being Studies in Semitic Philology and Literature, Jewish History and Philosophy and Folklore in the Widest Sense, in Honour of Haham Dr. M. Gaster's 80th Birthday*, ed. Bruno Schindler and Arthur Marmorstein (London: Taylor's Foreign Press, 1936), 58-63.

236 Hayyim Schirmann, *mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah* (Berlin: Schoken Verlag, 1934), 223-35.

237 Dan Almagor, "yosef ben shmuel tsarfati: bibliografyah mu'eret," in *Italia: Studi e ricerche sulla storia, la cultura e la letteratura degli ebrei d'itallia*, ed. Robert Bonfil (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1996), 53-113.

238 See source in the preceding footnote for most of these references.

THE BUDDING OF THE RENAISSANCE IN SPAIN AND ITALY

Before reviewing the life of Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, it is important to lay the broader context of Italy leading up to the sixteenth century. This context will allow for a richer mosaic within which the events of Tsarfati's life and his works may be better viewed and understood. The economic, literary, and communal development of the Jews in Italy in the centuries leading up to Tsarfati's time progressed along very different lines than those of their counterparts in Spain. In Spain, the Jews, Muslims, and Christians who had lived together during the era of the *convivencia* in al-Andalus had often experienced the type of prosperity and lack of social turmoil that allowed a free interchange of ideas.[239] As has been discussed above, Greek texts – or at least versions of them translated into Arabic with Arabic commentary – were introduced by Arabic scholars very early during the Middle Ages. This era of Andalusian thought and discovery lasted from the ninth to the twelfth centuries in the Iberian peninsula. Although much of northern Spain, which was not a part of the cultural efflorescence of al-Andalus, was not an immediate beneficiary of this literary progress, the borders between al-Andalus and the Christian north were fluid enough that the influence was felt. That influence rapidly increased as Christian Spain augmented its holdings during the *reconquista* and Hebrew and Arabic scholars became more broadly redistributed throughout the Iberian peninsula. This rise in knowledge of Platonic and Aristotelian Greek and Arabic texts – mostly

[239] Vivian B. Mann, Thomas F. Glick, and Jerrilynn Denise Dodds, *Convivencia: Jews, Muslims, and Christians in medieval Spain*, 1st ed. (New York: G. Braziller in association with the Jewish Museum, 1992), 11-38.

focusing on philosophy, theology, medicine, and law – then spread from Spain to other parts of Europe, including Italy, especially during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.[240] This spread of knowledge gave rise to the Scholastic movement of the High Middle Ages that motivated the creation of numerous new universities in Europe focused on the triclinium of law, medicine, and theology (with a heavy emphasis in philosophy).[241] This dissemination of knowledge increased during the numerous mass exoduses that sent educated Jews from Spain to France, Germany, and Italy during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Indeed, during the fifteenth century approximately 10,000 Jews and/or *conversos* came to Italy from Spain, further disseminating the Arabic poetic, literary, and philosophic forms that had had so much influence in the Iberian peninsula.[242] Thus much – although not all – of the learning that caused the explosion of knowledge in Italy came to it first from Spain. In the meantime, the flow of information that came to Spain from Italy toward the end of the fifteenth century caused a new explosion of scientific learning and a shift in focus away from scholastic thought and towards humanist thought in a Spain that had long since passed its time of rapid educational growth. The advent of the printing press in Spain, which came to that location a few decades after its first use in Italy, enhanced this shift in focus and sped up the dissemination of knowledge.

A general view of the history of Italy will reveal the significant differences between its cultural formation from that of Spain. It will also demonstrate some of the

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[240] Lisa Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy* (Upper Saddle River, N. J.: Prentice Hall, 2011), 42-46.
[241] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 92-99.
[242] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 216.

reasons why the shift in knowledge that occurred in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy and in the rest of Europe caused such a creative explosion that they have been given the name of a new era – the Renaissance. While the inhabitants of Spain were passing through the mostly prosperous and continuous rule of Muslim leaders from the eighth century onwards, the inhabitants of Italy were undergoing a devastating series of wars and disease that cleared the area of much of its population and forced them to focus more on survival than on cultural achievements. The invasions of Italy over the Alps by Germanic hordes that began in the fifth century, continued frequently until the eleventh century.[243] These constant invasions, coupled with various plagues that ran their course through Italy, meant that the population rapidly declined during much of this time. In the fourteenth century the population was cut in half again by the great plague. As one example, while the Jewish population in Italy appears to have easily numbered over 100,000-200,000 in the fifth century, with much of this population centered in Rome, when Benjamin of Tudela visited Rome in approximately 1130, he only found a Jewish population of 200 families, or an estimated 1,000 individuals living there.[244] Even after Jewish immigration into Italy in the fifteenth century, the population of Jews in Rome in 1527 was only 287 families, or approximately 1,500 individuals.[245]

Italy, along with other parts of Europe, had begun to enjoy increasing economic prosperity beginning in the twelfth century. Although it had continued frequently to

[243] Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy*, 4-5.
[244] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 83.
[245] Ibid., 116.

quarrel and even do battle with competing forces in Europe, the papacy centered in Rome grew in strength and consistency during this time. This growing wealth allowed for improved trade across Europe, and began materially to permit a growing level of education and cultural interest. As mentioned above, this sharing of knowledge gave rise in the twelfth century to an increase in the number of universities, all of which focused on the scholastic forms of rote learning and repetition.[246] Although these institutions continued in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, the depredations of several plagues that swept through Europe kept Italy from the economic and cultural improvements that would later be experienced. It was not until 1434 that the de' Medici family managed to unite the section of Italy around Florence into a cohesive unit with a level of prosperity high enough to exert a strong influence on cultural achievements.[247] This period of high prosperity mirrored a time of strength in the papacy in Rome, rapidly allowing these two political centers in Italy to cooperate and compete in the acquisition of classical Greek and Roman manuscripts in the fifteenth century. Although the prosperity of the de' Medici family in Florence faded by about 1520, the decrease in Florence led to an increase in Rome, as several of the de' Medici's, including Pope Clement VII, were made pope there.

With the influx of approximately 10,000 Jews from Spain during the fifteenth century, much more of the knowledge and learning that had already been important in

[246] Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought: The Classic, Scholastic, and Humanist Strains*, 95.
[247] George Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988), 57-58.

Spain was imported into Italy, and Jewish physicians and scholars could be found dotting the newly re-vitalized universities of the land.[248] At the same time, the invasion of Turks into the Byzantine empire meant that many Greek scholars fled from that area of the world, and came to Italy, often bringing manuscripts with them. Italy's location at approximately the mid-point of the Mediterranean, along with its growing security, brought scholars from across the Mediterranean. As many of these scholars gathered in Venice, Florence, and Rome, they searched the libraries of manuscripts that the papacy had been able to maintain over the course of its history, but which had lain in obscurity for centuries. Latin writings such as those of Tacitus on oratory and Vitruvius on architecture were rediscovered. As an additional – and probably the most important – impetus to this cultural flowering the printing press was developed in Germany in 1436 and began its operation in Italy in 1467. The elite of Italy rapidly became a book-reading people.[249]

This rapid alteration in the situation in Italy caused a veritable explosion of scientific, artistic, and literary discovery. Famous artists such as Brunelleschi (1377-1446), Donatello (1386-1466), Sandro Botticelli (1445-1510), Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519), Raphael (1483-1520), and Michelangelo (1475-1564) all lived during this time and spread their influence across the Mediterranean. All of them were trained in Florence and spent a considerable portion of their lives in Rome. Raphael, da Vinci, and Michelangelo purposefully mastered such a wide variety of skills in science, medicine,

[248] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 84; Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 152.
[249] Holmes, *Florence, Rome, and the Origins of the Renaissance*, 82-86.

literature, languages, architecture, and painting that in modern times they have come to be known as the prototypes of Renaissance men.[250] Although they of course would not have recognized themselves by that name, their success in multiple fields of endeavor spread to influence others, and reached back to the Spain that had influenced Italy earlier in the same century. While the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries have come to be known as the period of the High Renaissance in Italy, the era of literary, economic, and artistic achievement that has come to be known as Spain's Golden Age followed shortly thereafter in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. This era in Spain boasts of achievements from renowned writers and artists such as Fernando de Rojas (1465-1541) near Toledo, Cervantes (1547-1616) in Madrid, El Greco (1541-1640) in Toledo, Lope de Vega (1562-1635) in Madrid, and Diego Velázquez (1599-1660) in Seville and Madrid.[251]

As has been mentioned, the cultural period in Spain that was possibly the most similar to the High Renaissance in Italy had occurred centuries earlier during the time of al-Andalus. Since they are not considered part of the intellectual flowering of western, Christian Europe, the names from this early period in Spain are not nearly as famous. However, the ideal of a multi-faceted scholar that would later be known as the Renaissance man was in full sway in al-Andalus, where tenth century rulers such as Abd al-Rahman III and al-Hakam II in Córdoba and later in Toledo avidly collected as many Greek and Arabic manuscripts as possible. Important contributors to the scientific,

[250] Kaborycha, *A Short History of Renaissance Italy*, 48-53.
[251] Ibid., 113-16.

philosophic, and literary advances of the time included Muslim scholars such as Avicenna (980-1037) and later Ibn Tufail (1105-1185) and Averroes (1126-1198). Important Jewish scholars such as grammarian Dunash ben Labrat (920-990), philosopher and statesman Samuel Hanagid (993-1056), fellow poets and philosophers Judah Halevi (1085-1145), Solomon ibn Gabirol or Avicebron (1021-1058), Moses ibn Ezra (1055-1138), and Abraham ibn Ezra (1089-1164) were followed by the famous Jewish traveler Benjamin of Tudela (1130-1173), and the most famous of Jewish philosophers, Maimonides (1135-1204). Almost every one of these Arabic and Hebrew scholars had a highly versatile range of expertise, often delving into astronomy, philosophy, theology, poetry, languages, government, and medicine with equal facility.[252]

STATE OF JEWISH AFFAIRS IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY ITALY

The Jews and Central Governments

The situation of the Jews in Italy was in some ways more favorable than in any other place in the medieval and Renaissance world. Italy is the only area in the world in which Jews have been able to live continuously since ancient times.[253] In every other location, at some point or other the Jews had been expelled or forced to convert to Christianity. As has been mentioned above, the Jewish population had varied greatly in Italy over the centuries, mostly mirroring the fragile state of the general population there, but also due to state and religious pressures against the Jews. However, notwithstanding

[252] For the information presented in this paragraph, see Gampel, "Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Medieval Iberia: *Convivencia* through the Eyes of Sephardic Jews," 11-38.
[253] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 10.

the challenges that will be mentioned below, there was probably no safer place for the Jews to live than in Rome.

This relative safety – and at times prosperity – seems to have owed itself especially to two factors. First, strong central governments – with notable exceptions – throughout history have often favored the Jewish people because they found that population to be useful to them. The Jews as a whole were much more educated than their counterparts. The Catholic church did not encourage literacy in its general lay population, preferring to leave that ability in the hands of the clergy in order to increase their power and authority.[254] Therefore, most Christians throughout the Middle Ages, outside of the clergy and those who had been trained for purposes of their professions, were unable to read and write. On the other hand, Jewish males were strongly encouraged to be literate in order to be able to study their religious texts.[255] Indeed, the *bar mitzvah* ceremony that marks the coming of age of the Jewish male included the reading of scripture publicly as a way to mark the ability of the young man to take his place in the community. In addition, because the Jews often had to struggle for survival among various groups competing for power, they frequently excelled as merchants or diplomats. Many had learned the art of maintaining their religious beliefs while tactfully surviving in the world of a dominant culture that was not their own. Finally, it was often useful for government leaders to have a skilled group of leaders and administrators who were not at the same time a threat to usurp the crown. Since the Jews were a minority group that was

[254] Ginther, *The Westminster Handbook to Medieval Theology*, 37.
[255] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 71.

often not in favor with the general population, strong governments were often able to offer them protected status in exchange for their service.[256]

In many locations, including certain times and places in Spain and Italy, this meant that the Jews were given tax exemptions and other elements of protected status, but that in exchange they became to a certain degree the property of the state. This type of favor that was often provided the Jewish people by governments made them an object of jealousy and distrust for the general population, as well as for mid-level officials, who saw the Jews as robbing them of their opportunities for advancement. Thus there was frequently a strong tension between the central government, which sought to protect the Jews for its purposes, and the rest of the population, which exerted pressure on the central government to enact measures against the Jews. In addition, when the government was weak, or when distance from the power centers of the government made it less likely that the government would intervene, the Jews often suffered much more under the changing whims of the populace.[257] The other possibility of danger to the Jews under central governments came at times of weakness for those governments, when it became useful to use the Jews as scapegoats for economic, health, or religious challenges. At times a government in ascendancy would seek to mobilize an entire citizenship by uniting that citizenship against a common enemy. This was certainly the case in the Spain of Ferdinand and Isabella.

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[256] Baer, *A history of the Jews in Christian Spain*, 43-44.
[257] Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance*, 168.

Rome had almost always had the benefit of a strong central government of one type or another. During the days of the Roman Empire the Jews enjoyed a certain degree of safety and prosperity. Even after the fall of the Roman Empire, the Jewish population appears to have maintained its position with the subsequent governments, which usually adopted the existing religious and government infrastructure. The existence of the papacy in Rome also meant a fairly reliable government system. Although the fate of the Jewish population often depended on how strict or liberal the religious tendencies of the current pope were, the institution of the papacy in Rome consistently relied upon members of the Jewish population, particularly as physicians.[258] This meant again that while the Jews often enjoyed protected status, this was just as much because their rights were "owned" by the papacy as that they were truly favored. This level of control also meant a certain degree of risk if the new presiding authority decided that he did not favor the Jews. If protection that engendered the jealousy of the general population was removed or reversed, then the Jews would rapidly find themselves in challenging straights.

A second reason that Jews were able to live continuously in Rome throughout the centuries was that the policies of the papacy tended to be more moderate than that of local church leadership. There were certainly exceptions to this general rule. However, it appears that most popes understood that any law or bull propagated at the center of the papacy would be taken to much greater extremes in far-off locations where the papacy maintained less control. While all popes were confident that the Jews should not enjoy

[258] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 152.

all the same privileges as the rest of the Christian population, they nevertheless believed and taught that their lives should be protected, and that they should be treated with Christian love.[259]

The Jews and Money Lending in Italy

One of the contributing factors to the challenges and benefits that accrued to the Jews in Italy was the Catholic injunction against usury, or the lending of money in which interest was paid on the loan. Although in theory this would appear to be a generous provision that would protect the poor, in effect in created great hardship since most people were not willing or able to loan any amounts of capital if no benefit would accrue to them as a result, especially with the risk always inherent that loans would not be repaid. Thus those with the most power in society were the most likely to be able to obtain loans, but had the least use for them, while less-influential segments of the society did not have enough power to demand loans, but had dire need for them in order to survive, progress, or create materials useful for society. Therefore, for society to function and progress economically, it became very important that interest-bearing loans be allowed. Beginning in the late thirteenth century, when Europe actually began to have enough economic means that the question was viable, the solution that became more and more common was to use financially stable members of the Jewish population as money lenders.[260] However, since the practice was still frowned upon by the church authorities,

[259] Ibid., 97.
[260] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 32-41.

the solution of an extra tax upon interest-accruing loans was decided upon. In this way those that needed the money could obtain it and the state or the church was also able to receive benefit from the transaction.[261]

In the mean-time, this also meant the Jews in Italy and elsewhere were able to improve their financial status, which gave them greater opportunities for advancement and education, and making them more useful to their rulers. In most cities in Italy this meant that increasing numbers of Jewish inhabitants were attracted to the location. The ability to lend money, and the need of the general society for this service, appears to have at first been one of the greatest factors motivating an increasing Jewish population in Italy. This type of advancement also created a strong surge of anger among those who not only saw the Jews advancing in areas that were not available to others in society, but saw them doing it because of their lack of respect for the laws of the Catholic church.

Challenges for the Jewish Population in Italy

Although in many ways the Jewish population of Italy was safer than in other locations in Europe, such as in Spain, this does not mean that they were particularly safe or secure, or that they felt deep levels of trust for the church government that had so much power in their lives. As in other locations in Europe, the Jews at times suffered rapidly altering circumstances because of changes frequently occasioned when a new

[261] Another solution arrived at later were the *monte di pieta* institutions, which lent money at little or no interest, with pawn items delivered by the borrower as surety for the loan. These were charitable institutions (indicated by the word *pieta*) and were designed to help the needy in a community, and not for profit.

pope came into office, the economic situation at the time, or the frustrations of the general populace. While the Catholic church could grant positive benefits to the Jewish community, the power of the church rested outside of Jewish control, and it could easily take those benefits away. In addition, because the Jewish community in Italy was so close to the center of Catholic power, the "gaze" of the dominant society was upon them at all times. If the Inquisition in Spain caused the *conversos* to feel as if they were living in a panopticon, the presence of the Vatican in Italy had a similar impact. While this gaze at times manifested itself in ways that appeared to be benevolent, in general the Jews had to remember that this benevolence only extended as far as their usefulness. The better that they could fit the ideals of the governing hierarchy, the safer they would be. On the other hand, it was dangerous to trust the dominant hierarchy, and to be completely subsumed in the rules of that society – in other words for a Jew to convert to Christianity – meant for many to cease to exist in their own community.

The same century that saw increasing prosperity for the Jewish community because of the need of the society for money lenders, also witnessed increasing persecution, as might be expected. In 1215 Pope Innocent III, apparently responding to loud complaints from his Christian subjects, first instituted measures that were heavily detrimental to the Jews, altering the decisions of former popes.[262] First, Innocent proclaimed that because they were part of the same society as Christians, and accrued the benefits of the papal government, the Jews should pay the same tithing to the church as

[262] For the changes discussed in this paragraph, see Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 96-98.

Christians. For the first time – at least on a general level – non-Christians were forced to live this Christian law and support a religious structure that was not their own. Additionally, special taxes were placed on any service that Jews provided to Christians, whether connected to money lending (which had moral implications for Christians because of the religious prohibition on usury), or associated with some other employment that had no overt ethical connection with church policies. Next, Innocent proclaimed that Jews could not be in any community or work position in which they had authority over a Christian. This created strong hardships for the Jews, and under certain interpretations worked to reverse the advantage that money lending had given them. The building of new synagogues was also forbidden by Innocent. This practice was extended to include not only new buildings, but even in certain locations included the remodeling or repair of older buildings. Buildings that had fallen into too much disrepair to be useful were at times abandoned by the Jews, only to be taken by Christians so that they could be repaired and converted into churches. One synagogue converted to a Catholic church in Sant Anna still bears the original Jewish inscription commemorating its initial construction in the early thirteenth century.[263] Finally, Innocent proclaimed that Jews had to wear a special badge to identify themselves.

While these measures did not last long, their creation in the thirteenth century allowed their resurgence in subsequent periods and in other locations. Many of the rulings – including those regarding synagogues, distinctive dress, and the positions that

[263] Ibid., 101.

Jews were permitted to hold – were adopted in 1265 by Alfonso X of Spain, and used in his *Siete Partidas*.[264] Although the *Siete Partidas* were not put into effect in Spain until 1348, they had a strong influence on subsequent legal rulings in Spain and elsewhere, such as Italy. If a leader or community decided to adopt measures against the Jews, those measures could be justified by the decisions of Pope Innocent III and of Alfonso X.

The distinctive Jewish badge in particular gained such popularity that it became a common feature in almost any period and community in Italy. At times the badge was described by the leaders as offering the Jews special protections, but for the Jews it was always a way for the church and the government to exert authority and ownership over them, to allow the "gaze" of authority to rest more easily and completely upon them, and to maintain the status of the Jews as the "other". The only other populations in Italy that were required to wear a distinctive badge or marking were the lepers and the prostitutes, and the necessity of the marking for the Jews identified them as connected to these other outcastes in their own eyes and in the eyes of the community.[265]

The type of badge altered depending on the time and location. In the thirteenth century under Emperor Frederick, the badge for the men was to be blue in the shape of the Hebrew letter *tav,* and the women were to wear veils that had two to three blue stripes through them. The men were also required to wear beards to distinguish themselves. In Rome and Venice in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the badge was to be yellow,

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[264] Juan Carlos Mondragón, ed. *Siete Partidas* (Montevideo: Librería Linardi y Risso, 1998), 112-15.
[265] Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, 133-35. See these pages also for the description of badges in the following paragraph.

and had to be worn conspicuously on the chest. Informants were rewarded for reporting non-conformance and the failure to report non-compliance could be punished, effectively turning not only Christians against the Jewish "other", but also turning fellow Jews against their own community, in a Foucauldian prison paradigm of control.[266] For a time in Rome the coloring of the badge changed to a red tabard (or cape) for the men and a red petticoat for the women, but by the time of Tsarfati, the yellow badge was again the norm. In Venice, where Tsarfati lived for a time, the badge of a yellow letter "O" was changed to be a yellow hat.

Other measures were begun during the thirteenth century that would continue to be introduced from time to time throughout the following centuries, and would have an impact during Tsarfati's lifetime. At two different times in the thirteenth century the pope banned the Talmud and other religious texts, having been persuaded that these texts included anti-Christian and anti-Christ rhetoric. One ban in 1294 led to the burning of over 13,000 books.[267] The banning of Jewish religious texts was not in any way constant, but was another practice that continued to re-emerge numerous times over the next centuries, as a means for the Christian hierarchy to control and influence the discourse labeling the Jews and their ideas as "other."

Late in the thirteenth century, a Christian ruler in southern Italy, Charles of Hohenstaufen, brother of Louis IX in France, agreed with his brother that the best

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[266] See also Gilman's description of Jews who turn against their own communities, in Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, 41-49.
[267] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 142.

argument to use against Jews was "a sword driven into the midriff as far as it would go."[268] While this statement was not necessarily public policy, this attitude coincided with increasing violence against the Jews. Dominican friars were subsidized to preach against the Jews in their own Hebrew language, and the Jews were forced to admit anti-Jewish preaching in their synagogues during set times in the year. The discourse of the dominant culture, proclaiming the inferior and base status of the Jews, was all-pervasive both in Christian and Jewish communities. These measures against Judaism were accompanied by a wave of conversions to Christianity. The Jews were encouraged to convert by the promise that they would be exempt from any taxes normally owed by any member of society for the period of two years.[269] New converts were strongly encouraged to preach to and against their former community to demonstrate the sincerity of their conversion to Christianity, increasing the pervasiveness of the dominant discourse.

The end of the thirteenth century also witnessed the beginning of blood libels against the Jews, in which it was claimed that the Jews would murder Christians – particularly Christian children – in order to use their blood for ritual purposes on their holy days, or in order to make a mockery of Christian institutions during Passover and Easter. As a result of these rumors, almost any time that a Christian child became missing in a community, the Jews were accused of murder, and were violently attacked and punished for their crime without any legal proceedings. In 1485 in Mantua, the Jews were accused of kidnapping and killing a Christian child, and were only saved from mass

[268] Ibid., 99.
[269] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 102-07.

execution when the body of the drowned boy was found just before their hangings.[270] Jewish communities were also accused of blasphemies against the Christian faith, such as an accusation in Milan in 1336 that they had stolen crosses and images of the Virgin Mary, and had walled them up in their new synagogue.[271] This accusation was followed by the pillaging of the entire Jewish community in Milan. Blood libels led to pillaging and violence against Jewish communities in Venice and Rome during Tsarfati's lifetime, in 1509 and 1523, and later in 1530 and 1553.[272]

The virulent preaching of the Dominicans and Franciscans to and against the Jews continued to create problems. In the late fifteenth century, during the lifetime of Tsarfati's father, Samuel, and possibly during Tsarfati's childhood, two particularly vehement preachers – Giovanni da Capistrano and Friar Bernadino da Feltre – had wide-ranging popularity throughout Italy and France, and stirred up such negative emotions in the Christian population that violence constantly followed their preaching within a community.[273] Capistrano preached – and at one point persuaded Pope Nicholas V to put into formal effect – that it was against the law to eat with or hold any type of communication with a Jew. This of course meant that in communities that followed Capistrano's teachings, Jews could not function in any capacity in the community whether as physicians, financiers, etc. He taught that Jews might be loved by Christians

[270] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 182.
[271] Ibid., 142.
[272] Bonfil, *Jewish Life in Renaissance Italy*, 107-10.
[273] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 162-73. These pages also contain the information found in the subsequent paragraphs. Much of this information can also be found in Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance*, 119-24.

in the general sense, but that in the particular sense Jews should be hated by Christians for their role in the crucifixion of Christ. Because of its purported anti-Christian rhetoric, Jews were forbidden from the reading of the Talmud.

Capistrano led a debate in 1460, following the model provided by similar debates in Spain,[274] in which forty Jewish delegates were sent to discuss the advantages of Christianity over Judaism. In these debates the Jews were only allowed to say certain things, and were in fear of their lives if they spoke too forcefully. This particular debate concluded with Capistrano proclaiming complete victory, and in the baptism of the Jewish rabbi and all of the other leaders, as per the conditions that had been imposed upon the debate. This mass conversion led to many other conversions in the Jewish community. Again, Jews who converted were offered monetary rewards such as a reduction in taxes. Capistrano offered a boat to the Pope to expel all Jews who did not convert, but this expulsion in Rome never took place. However, expulsions of the entire Jewish population often followed Capistrano's visit to locations in southern Italy, although these expulsions usually were not carried out to completion, and often did not last long. Before the time of the de' Medici family in Venice a series of sermons by Capistrano led to violence against the Jews and their ultimate expulsion from that city state.

After Capistrano departed to preach in France, his enthusiastic style was taken up by his follower Friar Bernadino. In 1475 in the community of Reggio near the border of

[274] The most famous of these was the Disputation of Barcelona, held in 1263. See Gabriel Jackson, *The Making of Medieval Spain* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), 242-45.

France, he leveled the accusation of the ritual murder of a Christian boy against the Jewish community. When the boy's body could not be located, the entire community was arrested and tortured until many confessed. Those who confessed were forcibly baptized and then executed. Those who did not confess were executed without first being baptized. Bernadino's preaching led to violence in Florence and elsewhere in the decade of the 1490's, but his early death in 1494 provided an extensive level of relief to the Jews. However, this incident would likely have created a strong impression upon young Tsarfati, whose family was closely connected with Florence.

Bernadino's preaching coincided with the Spanish expulsion, which led almost 9,000 Jews to Italy in 1492. In Naples, friars wandered the piers where exhausted Jews came into port, offering bread and water to the starving immigrants, but only in exchange for conversion. Elsewhere some communities offered the Jews the option of either converting, or being turned away. At times the Jewish population already living in Italy was a part of the problem. Fearing growing levels of persecution and jealousy, and wishing to protect privileges that the church had provided them, the existing Jewish community in Rome petitioned Pope Alexander VI to reject the new arrivals, but he refused this petition.[275]

Although it has been stated that the Jews were often safer in the city of Rome under its strong, centralized government than in other locations, the Jews were under threat of expulsion there from time to time, along with other hardships that were imposed

[275] Gilman, *Jewish Self-Hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews*, 48; Roth, *The Jews in the Renaissance*, 167.

upon them only in that location. In 1320, a race was begun in Rome in which Jews acted as the mounts for Christians. The young and old were often used in these races, were mocked by the onlookers the entire way, and often were badly injured in the process. After a number of years of this practice the Jews petitioned for a cease to the race. The practice was ended, but only because in its place the Jews of Rome were required to pay a sizeable tax each year in order to avoid the event.[276]

Notwithstanding all of these hardships, the situation of the Jews in Rome and elsewhere in Italy truly was in general more stable than in any other location. Strong measures against the Jews often came from lower levels of leadership in the church, while most popes seemed to maintain an attitude of benevolence towards them. This was especially true during the era of the popes who lived during the lifetime of Joseph Tsarfati and his father, Samuel. In 1471, Pope Sixtus IV began a very worldly papacy, mirroring some of the values in vogue in Renaissance Italy. It was said during the time of his leadership that anything in Rome could be bought for money, and accounts of irreligious behavior in the pope's courts, including wild orgies, were frequent during his rule, and later during the rule of the Borgia Alexander VI.[277] This level of tolerance often coincided with a tolerance for practices and groups that were considered non-Christian, and the Jews frequently benefited under the rule of these popes. Pope Clement VII, who ruled during Tsarfati's life, was especially known for his friendship and benevolence to

[276] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 140.
[277] See William Manchester, *A World Lit Only by Fire* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 1992); Johann Burchard, *Pope Alexander VI and His Court: Extracts from the Latin Diary of the Papal Master of Ceremonies, 1484-1506*, trans. F. L. Glaser (New York1921).

the Jews. However, it was generally felt by the Jewish community that positive developments could not be completely trusted. The continued existence of actions against the Jews throughout Italy was a constant reminder that the situation of the Jews in Rome was always precarious.

The Jews and the Renaissance

The same fervor for change that gripped Italy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was also manifest in the Jewish population. Rome was the birthplace of Hebrew printing in the late fifteenth century,[278] making Hebrew books available in ways that had never before been possible. In the fourteenth century, Immanuel of Rome[279] had already begun to adopt many of the literary techniques that had been introduced by Spanish Jewry, and that would later be used in a broader sense by much of Italian Jewry. In his Hebrew poetry, Immanuel used Arabic poetic forms and meters. He introduced the sonnet into Hebrew poetry and did not limit himself to completely religious themes. Instead he was comfortable whether working in religious or non-religious subject areas. He was capable of composing a deeply religious poem, and immediately afterward could be found creating a poem of erotic comedy. Although this led many Jewish leaders to reject his works,[280] this style gained increasing acceptance, and by the time of Tsarfati it had become commonplace that religious Jews could also participate fully in the secular

[278] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 262.
[279] Giuseppe Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb: Foundations and Challenges in Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 53-58.
[280] Ibid., 58-65.

advances of the day, just as they had in al-Andalus. Just as Renaissance figures such as Leonardo da Vinci consciously strove to master knowledge in multiple areas, Jewish figures also worked to adopt the ideal of the complete man, known during the Renaissance as the *homo universalis*, and by Jews known as the *hakham kolel*. In the fifteenth century, Rabbi Judah Messer Leon actively encouraged his students to embrace this ideal, becoming perfect scholars both in rabbinic scholarship, but also in the secular teachings of the day.[281]

In Italy, as in Spain, the changes of the Renaissance also encouraged a certain degree of religious skepticism as scientists and scholars fought against old concepts such as the geocentric model of the universe that had been promulgated by the church. However, for the Jews, religious skepticism does not appear to have been as pervasive as it was in Spain.[282] This was due to many factors. The institution of the church was not nearly as brutal in Italy as it was in Spain, and its discourses were not as forcefully pervasive. In Rome the Jews were typically not forced to abandon their own religion. Therefore Jews could continue to practice their own faith while still participating in the academic freedoms of the Renaissance. Although these academic freedoms led some to increased skepticism, and to abandon their faith, this was not a forced abandonment that caused a crisis of identity and self-doubt, but was more often a voluntary reversal of

[281] Tirosh-Rothschild, *Between Worlds: The Life and thopught of Rabbi David ben Judah Messer Leon* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991).

[282] Shulvass, *The Jews in the World of the Renaissance*, 211. However, there were some instances of mass conversions. One of these occurred in wake of the disillusionment occasioned by the false messiah-ship of Asher Lemlein. Another occurred in Naples in 1492 after it was conquered by Charles VIII, king of France. The harsh edicts given by Pope Paul IV in 1555-59 appear to have occasioned a large number of conversions as well. See Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 210.

sentiment. Jews who lived in Rome were more easily able to believe that God still loved his Jewish people, even though the time for redemption had not yet arrived.

THE LIFE OF JOSEPH BEN SAMUEL TSARFATI

An understanding of the life of Joseph Tsarfati must begin with a review of the life of his father, Samuel Tsarfati. Samuel Tsarfati, who died in 1519, was also known by the Italian surname of Gallo. The Hebrew *Tsarfati* (Eng. "Frenchman") and the Italian *Gallo* (Eng. "from Gaul") both refer to the original location of the Tsarfati family in Provence, at the French border to Italy. In modern times the name Tsarfati – which has been transliterated in English as Sarfati, Sarfatti, Sarphatti, Zarfati, Tzarfati, etc. – is considered a Sephardic name, since families with this last name are typically found in Sephardic communities. Additionally, the master of ceremonies for Pope Alexander VI referred to Samuel Tsarfati, as "the Spanish rabbi, physician of the pope."[283] For this reason many scholars of *Celestina* refer to Joseph Tsarfati as a Sephardic Jew. It is likely that the Tsarfati family had originally immigrated to Provence from within Spain.[284] Significant populations of Sephardic Jews did migrate to France and to Italy in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries beginning with the anti-Jewish revolts of 1391 and ending with the expulsion in 1492. However, there is no record of Joseph's or Samuel's abilities to speak Spanish, although Joseph's many other linguistic skills were referred to

283 Burchard, *Pope Alexander VI and His Court: Extracts from the Latin Diary of the Papal Master of Ceremonies, 1484-1506*, 27.

284 Samuel Tsarfati's family should not be confused with the Trabot (or Trabotti) family, who came to Italy from Trévoux, France in the second half of the fifteenth century, or with the Sarfaty family of rabbis who resided in Fez, Morocco for several generations (sixteenth – eighteenth centuries).

by others in his time, as will be seen below. The Tsarfati family may have been long-time residents of Provence (an area bordering the northeast boundary of Spain) who were given the name Tsarfati after their move from Provence to Italy. Still, Tsarfati's possible Sephardic background adds another intriguing connection with the Spanish *converso* Fernando de Rojas.

The move of Samuel's family from Provence to Italy which took place in 1498 was necessitated by the expulsion of all Jews from Provence that occurred between 1493 and 1500. Although Samuel, who was already functioning as a well-known physician in Provence, was assured by King Louis XII that he and his family would not personally be bothered, Samuel apparently believed it preferable to immigrate, carrying with him the letters of protection and safe-conduct from King Louis.[285] In Rome he became famous for his abilities as a medical doctor, and was reputed to be "the most able physician in Italy."[286] Because of his popularity there, Pope Alexander VI appointed him as one of his personal, court physicians and granted him certain privileges, including the right to attend to Christian patients, exemption from wearing the Jewish badge of identification, and papal protection for him and for his family.[287] As a result of these privileges, Samuel continued a rapid ascent in prominence, both in his status as a rabbi representing the Jewish community, and in his status as a Jew among the Christian community. He represented the entire Jewish community of Rome and of Italy during the coronation of

[285] Mosheh David Cassuto, *hayehudim befirentze bitequfat hareneysans* (Jerusalem: Mekhon Ben-Tsevi, 1967), 269. See also Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, 83-84.
[286] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 202.
[287] Cassuto, *hayehudim befirentze bitequfat hareneysans*, 270; Gaetano Luigi Marini, *Degli Archiatri Pontifici*, vol. 1 (Roma, 1784), 290-91.

Pope Julius II, presenting the petition of the Jews for the continuance of their privileges and offering a speech that purportedly made a considerable impression. By a papal bull of May 14, 1504, Samuel's rights which had previously been granted him by Alexander VI were confirmed, and he was appointed the Papal Archiater (personal physician).[288] Soon after the appointment it was jealously noted by his competitors that Pope Julius trusted him more than any Christian physician in his service. Thus, in many respects, Samuel held the most influential position of any Jew in Italy.

On August 17, 1511, during a summer noted in histories for its torrid heat, Julius II fell so seriously ill that most of his attendants believed that he would not survive.[289] Samuel, who was called along with other Christian physicians to try to save his life, had to work hard to prevent the other physicians from overdosing him with rhubarb.[290] Four days after his illness began, the pope slipped into a coma, all other papal physicians pronounced him dead, the palace servants began to plunder the papal chambers, and the cardinals prepared for a conclave to choose the next pope. However, Samuel proclaimed that he was still alive and that he could still return to health. This proclamation would have been made at great personal and communal risk, as it would have directly challenged the opinions of the Christian physicians, who would have used any clear

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[288] Marini, *Degli Archiatri Pontifici*, 1:517-19.

[289] For this account, see Padre López de Toro, *Documentos inéditos para la historia de España*, vol. 10 (Madrid, 1955), 370-71; Cecil Grayson, *Guicciardini: History of italy and History of Florence* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1964), 34.

[290] Rhubarb was regularly used in medieval times as a strong cathartic and laxative. However, it also has an astringent effect on the mucous membranes of the mouth and the nasal cavity. See Steven Ytugut Foster and Chongxi Yue, *Herbal Emissaries: Bringing Chinese Herbs to the West* (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 1992), 135.

failure by Samuel as evidence that his abilities could not be trusted and that the pope should never have entrusted a Jew with his well-being. However, Samuel's prediction proved correct. A few days later the pope revived, asked brusquely for a drink of wine, and immediately left his bed to resume work. He lived for two more years, and Samuel's reputation as a physician became even more deeply ensconced.

Upon Julius II's death in 1513, Pope Leo X, son of Lorenzo de' Medici (the de facto ruler of the Florentine Republic until his death in 1498), confirmed Samuel's status.[291] Two years later in 1515, Samuel was summoned to Florence to treat Giuliano de' Medici, Duke of Nemours and the pope's brother. Upon Giuliano's recovery he kept Samuel in his service, sending all of his other personal physicians away.

It appears that this visit was also helpful to Samuel's son Joseph. In Florence Joseph Tsarfati – known to his Christian friends as Giuseppe or Giosifante Gallo – initiated valuable friendships with Moshe ben Joab da Rieti and Solomon Poggibonsi, who were well-known Jewish poets and composers of their time, participating fully in the literary, philosophical, musical, and scientific currents of Renaissance Italy while remaining faithful to their traditional Jewish background. These three became the foundation of a circle of Jewish poets and thinkers in Florence.[292] Joseph had already begun to flourish not only as a physician, but also among the Jewish literati of Rome. He had received confirmation from Pope Julius II, in 1504, of the same rights that had been

[291] Marini, *Degli Archiatri Pontifici*, 1:633; Cassuto, *hayehudim befirentze bitequfat hareneysans*, 272; Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, 84.
[292] Dan Almagor, "umah shlomo shel shlomoh?," *Hado'ar*, March 18, 1994, 22-26.

given to his father.[293] He was already the developed man of letters who had translated *Celestina* in 1507, as will be discussed below. And he had already formed many of the Christian associations that would continue to be important to his success as a writer in the future. Tsarfati aspired to be a complete man of letters, a *hakham kolel*, learned in all areas of the thought and literature of his time, including mastery of Greek and Latin, along with Semitic languages, such as Hebrew, Arabic, and Aramaic. Tsarfati did not just spend time with languages, but was also known as an able philosopher and mathematician. As Pierio Valeriano, another Renaissance humanist favored by the de' Medici family, states in *On the Ill Fortune of Learned Men*:

> He [Giosifante] had devoted the greatest effort to philosophy and mathematics, had progressed wonderfully in Hebrew literature under his father's teaching, and not content with this learning of his ancestors, had aspired also to Greek. Moreover, he had learned Latin well enough to challenge all his contemporaries in Rome in the elegant simplicity of his verse and prose and to compete on an equal footing with all the young men. In addition to these attainments, he was endowed with the most upright character, so that you would find nothing wanting in the young man apart from the knowledge of the Christian religion.[294]

While in Florence, where his family remained until Samuel's death in 1519, Tsarfati explored a wide variety of themes and poetry in Latin and in Hebrew about such

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[293] Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, 84.

[294] Pierio Valeriano, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men: a Renaissance Humanist and His World*, trans. Julia Haig Gaisser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 111. Valeriano's assessment that the only thing lacking in Tsarfati was that he was not Christian humorously shows that no matter how much Tsarfati worked to be acceptable to Christian society, he would always be perceived as the "other."

Valeriano (1477-1558) lived in both Venice and Rome at roughly the same time as Tsarfati, and would have been well acquainted with his personality, skills, and achievements. It is unknown at what point of his life he wrote the work *De Infelicitate Literatorum* that is quoted here.

topics as wine, card playing, love, religious books, etc.[295] Tsarfati appears to have been the first poet to introduce the Italian form of *ottava rima* into Hebrew poetry.[296] Tsarfati's influence on Moshe ben Joab was strong enough that this poet composed a beautiful elegy to Tsarfati at the time of his death. Tsarfati's friendship with the de' Medici family also appears to have been strengthened by his time with his father in Florence. This friendship would become increasingly important during his later years in Rome, since another of the de' Medici sons, Clement VII, would become pope and form a close association with Tsarfati during Clement's rule.

After a productive time of growing influence in Florence, Tsarfati's life took a surprising and challenging turn.[297] At the time of his father's death, a servant stole from the chest in which it was stored all of Tsarfati's inheritance – many thousands of gold coins – and fled with the wealth to Constantinople. In an exciting account of intrigue, Tsarfati chased him all the way there. However, he was not allowed entrance at any of the ports or places of refuge. Even worse, the clever thief denounced Tsarfati as a spy of the Roman pope. Police were sent to arrest him and he was wounded as they nearly detained him, but managed to escape with his life. He made his way back to Italy without having accomplished anything, having lost his inheritance, and having wasted any financial security he had gained of his own accord on the ill-fated trip.

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[295] The information in this paragraph is mostly taken from Cassuto, *hayehudim befirentze bitequfat hareneysans*, 340-50.

[296] This poetic form consists of eight iambic lines, usually iambic pentameters. Each line consists of three alternate rhymes and one double rhyme, following the a-b-a-b-a-b-c-c pattern.

[297] Valeriano, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men: a Renaissance Humanist and His World*, 111.

Following this mishap, Tsarfati moved back to Rome, where Pope Clement VII – the brother of Leo X and member of the de' Medici family – renewed his father's papal privileges and made Joseph his personal Papal Archiater.[298] Joseph again set up his practice and began to enjoy enormous success in Rome. He built up a fashionable clientele that included service to and friendship with some of the most influential cardinals in the church. Tsarfati's connection and influence with the pope was strong enough that the pope even elected to live in Tsarfati's own residence during an entire summer when the noise of the papal palace was too much for the pope to feel that he could accomplish his work.[299] Of all of the locations available to Clement, it is interesting that his first choice was the home of his Jewish physician.

During these years Tsarfati's reputation not only increased in the area of medicine, but also in literature. During a time when Christians were first beginning to gain interest in the Hebrew language as a way to gain an understanding of biblical literature, and not just as a tool to use against the Jews, Tsarfati served as the Hebrew teacher for the linguist Teseo Ambrogio, who subsequently became a professor of Oriental languages at the University of Bologna.[300] Tsarfati's knowledge of Hebrew and of other Semitic languages became a gateway for Ambrogio into an understanding of multiple Semitic languages. In 1539 Ambrogio published one of the first studies in comparative Semitic linguistics – *An Introduction to the Chaldean Language, Syriac, and*

[298] Marini, *Degli Archiatri Pontifici*, 5:268-71.
[299] Rieger, *Geschichte der Juden in Rom*, 87.
[300] Valeriano, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men: a Renaissance Humanist and His World*, 111.

Armenian, and Ten Other Tongues[301] – a work well ahead of its time in concept if not in content.

Tsarfati not only had great influence with the Christian community of Rome, but stood as a leader of the Jewish community as well. In his position as a rabbi and physician of prosperity and influence in that community, he was able to welcome the Messianic claimant David Hareuveni during his visit to Rome in 1524. Hareuveni includes Tsarfati as one of only three individuals he mentions upon entering that city: "I went to the Pope's palace, riding on horseback, and my servant before me, and the Jews also came with me, and I entered the presence of Cardinal Egidio; and all the Cardinals and Princes came to see me, and with the said Cardinal was R. Joseph Ashkenazi, who was his teacher, and the physician Rabbi, Joseph Sarphati."[302] The Cardinal Egidio (known elsewhere as Aegidius of Viterbo) was another student of the Hebrew language and collector of Hebrew manuscripts. Widely considered at the time to be Pope Clement's successor, he believed that the Jewish Kabala, in general, and the *Zohar*, in particular, proved the veracity of Christianity. He championed the preservation of the Talmud at a time when it was threatened with burning by the Catholic church, and acted as a friend to the Jews throughout his life. Egidio was thus an influential Christian counterpart to the Jewish influence of Tsarfati.[303]

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[301] Teseo Ambrogio, *Introductio in Chaldaicam linguam, Syriacam, atquen Armenicam, et decem alias linguas.* (Pavia, 1539).
[302] David Hareuveni, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts*, trans. Elkan Nathan Adler (New York: Dover, 1987), 270-71.
[303] John W. O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform: A Study in Renaissance Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1968), 6-10.

Tsarfati not only welcomed Hareuveni into Rome, but also extended his influence and support to him throughout his more than nine-month stay in that city, until his departure to Portugal in March of 1525. Indeed, during three months of this stay Hareuveni lived in the home of Tsarfati, developing a personal friendship and rapport with the physician and litterateur. Hareuveni devotes multiple pages of his personal journal to his time with Tsarfati:

> A great sickness came upon me and I said to them, "Find me a bath of hot water for I wish to go there"; and a man came called Yomtob Halevi, and he prepared me a bath and a good couch to sleep upon, and I entered the bath and slept there, and that day I let much blood, cupping all my limbs, and then I sent for the physician, R. Joseph Sarphati, and said to him, "Look how I am; if thou wishest to get a great name, let me stay in thy house and remain with me until my sickness leaves me. He did so, and I stayed in his house three months, and he paid all the expenses and for all I required, may the Lord bless him and his household! He gave me to eat and gave me various kinds of remedies, and boiled wine for me to drink and heated herbs and placed them on my feet, and washed my feet and anointed me, and took olive oil and put it in a big vessel; and I entered and washed in that hot olive oil, and I came out from the hot oil and lay on a good bed, and they changed the sheets each time, and I lay on the bed like a dead man; and they saw that there was gravel in my water, which is a bad sign, and I told them that I would not die from this illness until I had brought Israel to Jerusalem, built the alter, and offered sacrifice; but I got no sleep and was in great pain and lay between life and death… and God sent a great sweat on me on that day and I was healed from the great sickness…. And [my ten servants] all stayed in the house of R. Joseph Sarphati, day and night, and waited on me and slept in the house. And I called R. Joseph Sarphati and said to him, "Find me a hot bath," and he prepared a bath in the Synagogue of the Sephardim, and I got in and out… Then I returned to the house of R. Joseph Sarphati, but did not wish to reside there because of the sick men in the house… Three months I stayed in this [other] house [after the house of Sarphati], only because of my affection for them, for the house was very evil, and the Christian lords came to visit me in a house which was not fitting. After that I sent a letter to the Cardinal to tell him that I had left the house of Joseph Sarphati because of the illness that had come upon me in that house, and that I was now staying in a house that was not fitting nor proper.[304]

[304] Hareuveni, *Jewish Travellers in the Middle Ages: 19 Firsthand Accounts*, 272-75.

Tsarfati, in turn, composed a poem rejoicing in the coming of Hareuveni and the opportunities that he would bring to the Jews. This poem will be analyzed in the next chapter.

Tsarfati's personal care of Hareuveni, including all of his expenses as well as the expenses, food, and sleeping quarters for ten of Hareuveni's servants, provide insight into Tsarfati's prosperity while living in Rome, as well as his full support of the messianic claimant. Towards the end of Hareuveni's time in Rome, the Jewish population became divided in their support for him, but Tsarfati continue to provide him material support until the day that thirty prominent Jews left to accompany Hareuveni to Portugal.

At the height of his success and reputation in Rome, disaster again struck Tsarfati's fortunes.[305] Pope Clement VII had long been engaged in efforts to weaken the power of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V. Indeed, Clement's support of Hareuveni may have been part of this effort to shift the balance of power. After conquering the French army in Italy that had been supported by Pope Clement, Charles did not have enough money to pay his troops. Seeing the riches of the city of Rome, the imperial army, supposedly acting mutinously against the orders of its leaders, proceeded to sack Rome on May 5, 1527.[306] During this time Clement was able to escape death only by using a secret passage connecting the Vatican with the Castel Sant'Angelo. There he was held captive, along with many prominent citizens of Rome, until he was willing to

[305] Valeriano, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men: a Renaissance Humanist and His World*, 111-12.
[306] "The Sack of Rome (1527)," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, ed. Robert C. Broderick (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1976), 416.

concede most points of dispute between the papacy and the imperial throne. Other nobles saw their homes robbed and burned completely to the ground. Cardinal Egidio, for example, lost his entire library of manuscripts in a fire set by the pillaging army.

Tsarfati was an unfortunate recipient of these violent political and religious games, upheavals, and intrigues. Tsarfati's house was pillaged from top to bottom, and all of his goods and wealth were completely lost. Tsarfati himself was captured and physically tortured by members of the mutinous army. Understanding Tsarfati's value to the Jewish and Christian communities, four mercenaries held him captive for four days, demanding a great quantity of money as ransom. Tsarfati finally escaped in the middle of the night after his guards had fallen into a drunken sleep. However, he was only able to escape barefoot and nearly naked, wearing nothing more than his linen undershirt. Making his way toward the city of Tivoli, he fled to the village of Vicovaro, ten kilometers northeast of Tivoli. Having suffered severe deprivations on his trip through the cold to Vicovaro, Tsarfati contracted some type of infection that the inhabitants of the village identified as the plague (probably some type of typhus). Tsarfati was driven from the village and banished to the countryside. There Tsarfati died from starvation and thirst, sheltered only by a simple hut and with no one to even bring him a drink of water. Tsarfati had no known descendants.

THE HISTORICAL TSARFATI AT THE NEXUS OF CULTURES AND ERAS

As can be seen in this review of Italy's history and of Tsarfati's life, Tsarfati – like Rojas – also stood at the nexus of Christian and Jewish cultures, able to function as a

type of "go-between" for them. Like his father Samuel, Tsarfati literally acted as representative and a "go-between" for the Jews, providing gifts to the pope and using beautiful Latin in order to influence the pope's decision to maintain a continued relationship between the papacy and the Jewish people. Tsarfati also functioned in his role as one of the most important rabbis and leaders of the Jewish community when David Hareuveni came to Rome. As evidenced by his poetry, Tsarfati was a religious Jew who sought to be an example of the *hakham kolel* to his Jewish community. In order to fulfill this ideal completely, Tsarfati had to be loyal to traditional Jewish ideals. He had to communicate in ways that were acceptable to his community and that were within their expectation horizon. Tsarfati's role as one of the primary points of contact between the Jewish and the Christian community allowed him many privileges, but he had to be able to appreciate the benefits of Christian society without adopting the norms of that society into his life in ways that caused him to lose the trust of his own community.

Along with his successful petition to Clement VII for the continuance of Jewish privileges, Tsarfati's skill in operating in the liminal state between both cultures is evident in the choice that Clement VII made to live in Tsarfati's personal residence for an entire summer. To gain this level of trust, Tsarfati must have constantly courted the favor of his powerful Christian rulers, and must have been very comfortable walking in their circles of influence. Tsarfati's effective connection with the Christians and the positive perception he maintained with the Jews is also evidenced in Hareuveni's choice to live with him for three months. Hareuveni was desirous of communication with the dominant

Christian hierarchy, and in negotiating favors and assistance from them. In this position he would have desired to live with someone whose contact with that hierarchy was healthy and frequent. However as a messianic claimant, Hareuveni would have also needed to maintain his Jewish orthodoxy. That Tsarfati was able to assist in both of these ways is further indication of his abilities.

However, Tsarfati also had strong reminders that his standing with the Christian rulers was only strong while he was useful to them. His contact with the Catholic regime would have been a constant reminder to him of the low status held by the Jews. To maintain his position, Tsarfati had to be constantly subservient to that leadership. When his goods were stolen after his father's death, he did not receive any help or assistance during that time of personal challenge. Again during the sack of Rome, Tsarfati discovered that although his position of prominence in Christian society was high enough to make him a target of thieves, the position did not ensure him the protection that was afforded to Clement's close Christian associates. He was abandoned to his own best efforts at survival, and eventually found himself completely alone and starving to death. His utter solitude at the time of his death was a witness to the lack of regard that the dominant culture had for him.

As will be seen in the next chapter, Tsarfati's poetry and works fit the ideals of the educated man of his time. In his own literary efforts Tsarfati clearly followed the patterns that were in full sway in Italy in his day. However, Tsarfati's ready acceptance of the Messianic claimant Hareuveni is instructive, and may mark Tsarfati's connection

to his traditional culture, but also to the type of implicit religious trust and acceptance that did not typically fit in the Renaissance, but that was very common during medieval times. Tsarfati was not unique among the Jews in this regard. However, his rapid acceptance of Hareuveni and the leading role he played in the Jewish acceptance of Hareuveni do set him apart. The Jewish community of Rome was evenly split on the issue of Hareuveni's messianic claims,[307] and Tsarfati was found on the side of the non-skeptic. Tsarfati stood at the nexus of Renaissance and medieval times, utilizing many of the new forms of the Renaissance, but maintaining medieval concepts that would have increased his acceptance among his Jewish compatriots.

THE FICTIONAL TSARFATI

1) Reubeni, Prince of the Jews

In this section two modern pieces of fiction that use Tsarfati as a literary figure will be analyzed, although in both Tsarfati functions as only a peripheral figure to the main characters. The purpose of this section is to analyze how modern Jewish writers understand Tsarfati. Or, what is the image of the historical Tsarfati that modern Jewish authors portray in their fictional works? I will show that the way that these two authors portrayed Tsarfati coincides with the thesis of this study. In these two novels, Tsarfati functioned as a go-between for the Jewish and Christian societies, and as a transitionary

[307] Although many Jews of the time clung to the biblical hope for a powerful, delivering Messiah to rescue them from their subservient position to other nations, many others were skeptical of any individual who claimed to be that Messiah. Various false Messiahs had entered into Jewish society over the centuries, promising divine aid, but failing to deliver on those promises. Indeed one of these – Asher Lammlein, who will be discussed below -- only preceded Hareuveni by a little more than two decades and caused great disappointment among the Jewish community of Rome when his false claims failed.

figure in time. Analyzing these works also demonstrates how the image of Tsarfati, communicated through time, connects his life and times with the modern era, acting as a type of "go-between" for the past and the present.

The first of the two works to be analyzed is *Reubeni, Prince of the Jews*, by Max Brod.[308] Brod (1884-1968) was a German-speaking Czech Jew who was born in Prague, and was a well-known journalist, author, and composer. Brod fled to Tel Aviv with his wife in 1939 when the Nazis took over Prague, and later obtained citizenship in the new state of Israel. Over the course of his life Brod remained devoted to his Jewish faith. Two of his important literary friendships – with Jewish authors Franz Werfel and Karl Kraus – famously turned sour when his friends converted from Judaism to Christianity. Although it lies outside of the scope of this study, these experiences with his friends and with Christian culture form an interesting connection with those of Fernando de Rojas and Joseph Tsarfati.

Brod's historical novel, *Reubeni, Prince of the Jews*, details Hareuveni's rise and fall as a Jewish messianic claimant, and is based on Hareuveni's personal journal of his travels.[309] Among other themes, Brod explores Hareuveni's hate and love for the dominant Christian culture of his time. In the novel, Hareuveni admires this culture for its power and splendor, but abhors its overwhelming dominance upon the Jew. He similarly despises his Jewish compatriots for allowing themselves to be downtrodden, wishing they

[308] Max Brod, *Reubeni, Prince of the Jews: A Tale of the Renaissance*, trans. Hannah Waller (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928).
[309] See note 304. In this journal Hareuveni provides a first-hand account of his travels and the successes he had.

would learn lessons from the powerful Christians, and also loves his people and longs for their return to a position of power. Brod also explores the intersection of religious superstition evident among many faithful Jews, with the erudite and often faithless sophistication of the Renaissance found in the Christian cultures with which Hareuveni interacts.

Although Tsarfati is a minor character in the novel, his acceptance of Hareuveni's messianic mission connects his views and personality with those of Hareuveni. Thus to a certain degree, when Brod is describing Hareuveni's personality and outlook, he is also describing the personalities and outlook of Hareuveni's followers, such as Tsarfati. Brod also introduces a fictional daughter of Tsarfati into the novel, as will be discussed below, and her beliefs and behaviors serve to indicate Brod's view of Tsarfati as well.

From the first page of his novel, Brod connects Hareuveni to medieval, superstitious tendencies, building a basis for the type of mind that would be able to convince itself of the reality of Messianic claims. Writing of one of Hareuveni's days as a young boy in his parents' home, his description emphasizes in almost every sentence Hareuveni's religious zeal and superstition. After painting a picture of Hareuveni's early-morning scripture study, Brod states:

> With a practiced eye the boy searched among the commentators, singing all the while, his mind aglow and his small body swaying to and fro over the broad volumes. Long and loud was his final note: "with the evil instinct also?" But as the sound died away he suddenly took fright, for a faint echo quivered in the empty room. The boy went in terror of the night demons. He knew, of course, that spirits had no power over him as long as he was occupied with holy writ, but he had that moment come to a standstill: his mind had ceased working. Had not those last words of his rung out like a challenge? Dark and mysterious forces were

> rising up around him. He took a frightened glance at the door, where the parchment with the sacred verses hung on the lintel in a silver case. No spirit could pass that talisman. But what if there was a mistake in the Mesusa, a single letter – or even the head of one – missing! Such things did happen and in that case the formula was useless. The evil spirits made merry over it.

Hareuveni's mind is full of fear of the unknown, motivating his religious behaviors. He had been trained by his father to feel the evil rising around him, and sought for specific behaviors that could fight off the demonic influences. The religious script of the *mezuzah*, rather than teaching spiritual principles, in Hareuveni's mind functioned as an amulet to ward off the unknown spirits. The writing on the *mezuzah* had to be accurate not necessarily as a sign of devotion, but as a magical talisman to ward off the unknown powers of evil.

Brod continues his description of Hareuveni's studies:

> Drowsily the child warded off the evil, wondering what he should do if that terrible sorceress Bath-Chorin, "daughter of Liberty," came again. Everyone was clasped in her close embrace during sleep, but waked to find himself held by the finger-tips only. The boy had duly washed his hands first thing, then carried out and emptied the water to shake off Bath-Chorin. Yet he could feel her forcing her way in through the crack in the door, could feel her in his finger-nails – that favorite lurking-place of the *Shedim*, those goblins who could take on any human form. The only consolation was that they retained their chicken feet and by that you might know them. However had he not sprinkled the floor beside his bed with flour overnight in the hope of seeing their gruesome footmarks next morning? The candle on the table flickered. And suddenly there was a loud noise next door. David heard it plainly, and shuddered…. There was the noise again. Impossible to stay by himself any longer. He opened the door into his father's study, then stood silent on the threshold as he had seen his mother do. No one in the house dared to speak to Father. You waited in the doorway until he looked up and took notice.[310]

[310] Ibid., 3-5.

Over and over again Brod emphasizes Hareuveni's superstitious, "medieval" personality in the first three pages. His terror of evil spirits, his identification of the *mezuzah* as an amulet that will fail if even the head of a letter is missing, his sense that the evil demon is coming up through his fingertips, and his efforts to catch goblins by sprinkling sand or salt beside his bed to see the marks of their chicken feet – all of these behaviors that first describe Hareuveni are designed to mark him in the mind of the reader for the rest of the novel. Additionally, Hareuveni's position upon the threshold of his father's study is emblematic of his relationship with traditional Jewish society throughout the novel. He has been trained and taught by that society, and longs for the comfort and emotional security that it provides. But he remains on its outskirts, unwilling or unable to enter completely into its confirming embrace. At times he turns his back on that medieval, traditional culture in sign of his condemnation of it. Yet he consistently returns again to its threshold, looking inside but never completely entering.

Brod traces Hareuveni's early life as he comes to identify himself, notwithstanding his sinful nature, with the Messianic claimant Asher Lammlein (who died in approximately 1502).[311] Hareuveni believes that he will be Lammlein's superior, seeing himself as the actual Messiah of which Lammlein had proclaimed himself the forerunner. Brod describes the mental contortions that Hareuveni has to make under extreme emotional pressure to finally conclude that he is a savior figure for the Jews, and to abandon his parents and early childhood community in order to travel to his fame in

[311] Julius Hillel Greenstone, *The Messiah Idea in Jewish History* (New York: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1906), 189.

the Christian west. Brod describes Hareuveni, in all his self-deception, as a man with deep self-doubts, a terrible temper, and uncontrollable physical passions. At times Hareuveni gives in to these passions and sees with despair that he cannot be the holy figure of prophecy, but then rises to control them again and has his faith restored in his own power as a messiah to the Jews, but a messiah who is even more powerful because of his ability to delve into sin and understand it. Hareuveni will not allow himself to be bound to all of the petty rules and religious contrivances that have kept the Jews in subservience for so long, with their eyes piously cast down to the earth. In this way, Brod portrays Hareuveni's attempts to break free from his outdated Jewish practices and beliefs – as Hareuveni perceives them – and to accept the intellectual freedoms of the Renaissance, unshackled with the guilt of sin, and able to communicate effectively with other, non-Jewish communities. Brod does not portray this desire of Hareuveni's to leave behind the old as positive or negative. Rather, he simply emphasizes the constant pull of Hareuveni's old culture and beliefs which he leaves behind when he runs away from home, but to which he continues to return as the source of his identity. This pull is balanced by Hareuveni's knowledge that he is not really a faithful Jew in many respects, and is incapable of being so, and his desire to leave those constraints behind to gain knowledge of the wider world, a world unknown by the "good" Jews with which he was raised.

Brod's novel, which relies upon Hareuveni's actual diary for some of its details, describes the progress of the "prince of the Jews" as he visited Venice and then moved on

to Rome, the seat of Christian power. Hareuveni symbolically chose to ride a white horse as he passed through the gates, and the narrator describes how he ignored the hordes of Spanish Jews who sought entrance into the city as refugees from Spain. He did not want to be associated with these downtrodden weaklings. He came in power, with the story of a brother, Joseph Hareuveni, King of the Jews in Khaibar, where the descendants of Moses lived by the legendary river Sambation. Hareuveni sought an alliance with the Christians to help overcome the Muslim hordes that proceeded from Turkey to invade his homeland. He promised that King Joseph would provide the bulk of the army if the Christians would do their part. (Later in the novel, Brod continues to follow Hareuveni's journal faithfully as he describes how, relying on the recommendation of the pope, the king of Portugal promised eight ships and 4,000 cannons for the venture, but in the end reneged on that offer.)

For his part, the Pope Clement VII with whom Hareuveni dealt in Rome is portrayed by Brod as a clever, open-minded, but morally ambivalent Christian leader who saw in Hareuveni a way to further his own ends. Clement consistently treated Hareuveni with deference, but also gave hints of amusement at Hareuveni's claims as a messiah, and at times almost seemed bored with his own role as a pope. Hareuveni's passionate stance as a self-convinced and self-proclaimed savior for the Jews stands in sharp contrast to Clement's cool, dispassionate handling of the religious beliefs of his own Christian subjects and of Hareuveni. Although Brod never explicitly states it in the novel, Clement, raised in the de' Medici home during the time that modern historians describe as the

height of the Italian Renaissance, seems to fit those ideals perfectly. He is highly educated and open to new ideas. Although he stands at the head of the Christian faith, his aims seem to be more political, and his treatment of Christianity evinces more than a hint of skepticism. His cunning tends toward political control and power, desiring to use Hareuveni as a tool in his own political purposes, but having to handle him carefully so that the tool does not end up doing damage to Clement or the papacy.

Hareuveni, on the other hand, seems a mix of Renaissance and medieval ideals. He was raised in a home far to the east, where the concepts of Renaissance had only begun to arrive, a home where medieval superstitions still maintained a great deal of influence. Hareuveni demonstrates cunning and a breadth of knowledge almost comparable to that of Clement, and was willing to exercise duplicity to further his own ends, but his own self-concept truly was that of a religious leader with heavenly power and authority. Brod continues to play on this theme of Renaissance and medieval ideals throughout Hareuveni's time in Rome. Hareuveni first meets Machiavelli and later is introduced to da Vinci. Both of these men are fascinated by Hareuveni, but are somewhat confused by his odd, almost anachronistic behaviors. At the same time, Hareuveni learns wholeheartedly everything possible from these two Renaissance savants, excited by their breadth of knowledge and seeing them as tools placed in his path by God who is ordering his success and who would not allow him to fail.

Although in reality Hareuveni only stayed in the home of Tsarfati for a little less than half of his time in Rome, in Brod's novel, Hareuveni remains with Tsarfati for

almost the entirety of his sojourn in Rome. Tsarfati's wisdom and expertise with medicine are emphasized, along with his affluence and standing with the Jewish and Christian communities. However, besides these brief mentions, Tsarfati is defined more by his role as a willing satellite of Hareuveni than by a significant amount of direct character development.

Notwithstanding the brief attention given to Tsarfati, Brod does introduce a fictional character, Tsarfati's sister Dinah who lives in his home. The character of Dinah allows for a deeper analysis of Hareuveni's attraction for a family like that of Tsarfati. Since she is a female Brod is able to develop a romantic interest between her and Hareuveni that seems to define much of Tsarfati's own friendship with and support of the man. Although of a family with much more means and influence that Hareuveni, Dinah is in awe of Hareuveni, viewing his odd and cool behaviors as a sign of his mystical powers and insight. Hareuveni maintains this almost magical power over Dinah throughout his stay, at times treating her with cold indifference and even cruelty, and at other times granting her small glimpses into his personal psyche that deepen her infatuation with him. By the end of his stay, Dinah would do anything to help further Hareuveni's cause.

For his part, Hareuveni is physically and emotionally attracted to Dinah. This attraction and reminder of his physical passions and desires frightens Hareuveni and causes him to put on an austere front so as not to give away his weakness for her. At times his infatuation for her causes him to open up too much, revealing some of his own tortured self-doubts and insecurities. Then with a start he remembers who he is and what

he is representing, and with repugnance for his own weakness causes the wall to come crashing down again. With fear he realizes that his love for Dinah threatens to unravel all of his plans. However, his attraction to her also allows him to take her into his confidence in ways that ensure that she will continue to love and support him. Hareuveni even toys with the idea of consuming his physical passions with her as his rightful due. As he reasons, he has power and as the messiah figure he should be allowed to live above the rules that circumscribe the rest of the backward Jews. However, in the end he resists this urge, frightened by the potentially disastrous results if he does not fill the Jewish messianic ideal – or if he too far exceeds their "expectation horizon" as discussed in this study. In the following section, this inward struggle to connect or to remain aloof from the traditional Jewish community is portrayed by Brod:

> "You know, Dinah?" He spoke more gently and ran his hand lightly over her thick, soft hair. "Yet there is so much that you do not know… but supposing I tell you just one of all these things – you are too sensible to abuse my confidence. If I told you, for instance, how terrible it is for me to have to turn away those most wretched and downtrodden of our brothers, the Marranos[312], when they kneel in the dust before me; for I long to fall on their necks…The whole immense undertaking to raise the race which has been trodden underfoot for fifteen centuries would be in jeopardy if I yielded to my feeling for these loyal souls – my good feeling…" Never had he spoken in such wise, gasping out his anguish to the girl who listened so breathlessly, kneeling by the bed with head bent and her face in her hands. Only when Reubeni paused did she look up with tears gleaming in her eyes – and a new outburst would follow…[313]

This fascinating passage connects the Jews who love Hareuveni, such as Tsarfati and Dinah, with the *conversos* of Spain, whom Hareuveni partially despises and partially

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[312] This derogatory term for the Jews, discussed in note 5, was unnecessary to translate from the German since it exists in the same form in that language.

[313] Max Brod, *Reubeni, Prince of the Jews: A Tale of the Renaissance*, trans. Hannah Waller (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1928), 208-09.

loves because of their downtrodden state. Hareuveni, himself caught between two cultures and between the influences of the "traditional" and the "modern," seeks to bring traditional Jews out of their difficulties. After continuing to pour out his soul to her, Hareuveni goes too far, sharing his doubts of whether his mission can succeed, and comparing his role to a famous poem by Abraham ibn Ezra, in which ibn Ezra describes how pitifully he asks for the things he wants at the door of the great man:

Hareuveni then listens as Dinah brings the poem to its conclusion, in which ibn Ezra states that so it is for the Jews, for the "poor who are born with no star overhead." Hareuveni realizes in horror that he has slipped and revealed too much of his weakness to Dinah. However, for her part Dinah's response possibly reveals some of the emotions that Tsarfati himself may have felt during his time of championship with and support for Hareuveni:

> She stopped in alarm. "But that is not the case. Forgive me – what am I saying! No star? When yours is the glory and the kingdom."
>
> Reubeni turned away. Dinah could not forgive herself for quoting the inappropriate lines. It never occurred to her that Reubeni might be out of humor simply because he had let himself go too far in his revelations. Was he not the Messiah!... Dinah never doubted it for a moment. Reubeni's obvious sufferings, both in body and spirit, only strengthened her conviction.
>
> But his face, when he turned to her again, had assumed its usual mask of cold and watchful immobility. It was as if he had deliberately shaken off the temptation of the "beauty of Israel" the dancing and the gentle intimacy. "Call me your brother [Tsarfati] and a second doctor," he said harshly, "for I am determined to get well.
>
> The girl was alarmed. It might be his usual face, but that made it no better. The effect of it, after seeing him so human and tender and inspired, was too great. "Forgive me," she whispered shyly.

As mentioned, Dinah's role in the novel appears to represent Hareuveni's relationship with Tsarfati and with all of the Jews. On the one hand, Hareuveni despises the weak Jews who have stayed in their subservient, outdated positions for so long, bound down to useless rules and forms while other people (such as Clement, Machiavelli, and da Vinci) did not worry about rules but simply used power and boldness to obtain that which they desired and to change the world. He remained aloof from his own people because he believed himself superior to them, called out of the medieval fog to a higher purpose, and because he believed that associating with them would only assure that his mission would end in failure. On the other hand, he also felt great sympathy and connection for those that he was trying to help. In weak moments he realized that he longed for them because he was like them, and this awareness of his weakness made him angry. This aloofness combined with moments of miraculous caring drew the Jewish people, with Tsarfati one of the principal among them, to the mysterious, magical, saintly figure of Hareuveni. By providing Dinah, Brod defined Tsarfati and the rest of the Jews as a people who were themselves only beginning to emerge from the naiveté of medieval beliefs, emerging into the full light of the Renaissance, but still full of desire to play out their medieval religious drama.[314]

One of the ways in which the difference between the "backwards" Jews and the modern, "decadent" Christians seems to emerge in Brod's description is in their manner of communication. Hareuveni's attempts to conceal his real feelings and intentions are

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not skillful. The only reason they are effective at all is because of the desire that the Jews have to believe in the messiah figure. But in many respects Brod offers the image of a clumsy messiah figure, carefully used by the more cynical, powerful, and well-connected Christian hierarchy to Hareuveni's ultimate detriment and destruction. The "cultured" Christians can effectively conceal their purposes and pull the strings on other cultures. But Hareuveni is unable to conceal his true feelings, and must resort to a gloomy silence simply to maintain his subterfuge. The verbally facile pope and the taciturn messiah thus present a fascinating contrast. The hierarchical dominance of one community over the other comes into much sharper focus in light of the Renaissance ideal of the love of beautiful language. That Tsarfati, who stands at the nexus of the Christian and Jewish cultures, has staked his claims on the fortunes of the "medieval" Hareuveni is not a good sign for the hopes of the Jews.

2) *Vidui*

In 1991, Jonathan ben Nahum wrote a novel entitled *Vidui* (Eng. "Confessions")[315] which deals with the situation of the *conversos* in Christian Spain under the shadow of the Inquisition. The novel begins in 1485, seven years before the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. The protagonist, Andrés Gonzales, is a Christian priest, the son of a Jewish convert to Christianity. One day he reveals during a visit to a

[315] Jonathan ben Nahum, *Vidui* (Tel-Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1991). Ben Nahum wrote only two books, both in the 1990s, but both with a strong historical foundation. His second book was *Indi'anapolis: Apokalipsah* (Tel-Aviv: Hakibuts Hame'uhad, 1999). The novel *Vidui* was very successful in Israel and in 1996 was adapted into a play entitled *yehudi bahoshech*.

Catholic confessional that he has discovered anew his Jewish roots and faith. He believes he is talking confidentially to his mentor and close friend, and doesn't realize that an Inquisitor is sitting behind the partition, recording his confession word for word to use as evidence against him. The bitter irony of the Inquisition's use of facts that were revealed during a private confession is palpable throughout the novel.

In a brief note at the end of the novel, ben Nahum reveals that he is a descendant of a rabbi who left Spain for Saloniki during the expulsion, and that he sees himself in the fictional character of Andrés.[316] He also states that Andrés represents what he imagines Fernando de Rojas to have been.[317] Thus ben Nahum connects with Rojas over time through the fictional character of Andrés, who represents them both, making Andrés the go-between for ben Nahum and Rojas. However, since Rojas was the historical figure that prompted the entire story, the image of the historical Rojas is the true go-between for ben Nahum, communicating the *converso* situation of fifteenth-century Spain with ben Nahum's modern situation in Israel, and thereby connecting the two times and spaces. Andrés is ben Nahum's method of expressing that connection.

Ben Nahum uses *Vidui* in order to tie together the harrowing experiences of many other *conversos* during the time of the Inquisition. That ben Nahum's medium is

[316] Ben Nahum, *Vidui*. 153. Unlike the narrative of *Vidui*, in which ben Nahum is free to make connections as his imagination suggests, his notes are characterized by understatement. Since ben Nahum mentions that he sees himself in Andrés, it is interesting to note that on page 133 he calls Andrés "not a large man" (Heb. *lo gibor gadol*). This unassuming self-view of ben Nahum seems to be expressed in his notes.

[317] Ben Nahum even suggests an imaginary father-son relationship between the two, with Andrés as father and Rojas as son. See ben Nahum, *Vidui*, 152.

historical fiction – based on the Inquisitorial research of Hayim Beinart[318] – allows him to weave together a tale of the intrigues required of the *conversos*, making conjectures and connections that are plausible but that are outside of the realm of provable fact. One of the figures that ben Nahum deals with briefly in the novel is the famous Fernando de Rojas. The novel opens with and is framed by a fictional letter from Rojas to his father-in-law, Don Alvaro de Montalban, in which ben Nahum neatly ties together Rojas, Joseph Tsarfati, and David Hareuveni in a plot to maintain Rojas's and Don Alvaro's *converso* identities as a secret. Rojas sends the letter to his father-in-law by the hand of Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati. In the letter Rojas recounts that Tsarfati has been sent to Spain by Pope Clement VII. In his letter, Rojas mentions that Clement has removed from Tsarfati the Italian restrictions on Jews which prevent them from practicing medicine on Christians and which force them to wear distinctive marks of their Jewish descent. He implies that Clement has done this so that Tsarfati can travel clandestinely in post-exile Spain, where no practicing Jews are permitted to remain alive. Rojas tells Don Alvaro that the purpose of Tsarfati's visit is to procure medical books in Hebrew and Arabic that were left behind after the expulsion, to obtain a copy of *Celestina* that Tsarfati has promised to translate into Hebrew, and also in order to treat Don Alvaro's rheumatism.

However, all of these purposes are masks and subterfuges. Tsarfati was actually sent to Spain to convey the messianic claimant David Hareuveni to Portugal in order to complete a treaty with the King of Portugal that Tsarfati believes will be of benefit both

[318] See Beinart, "'edim yehudim mita'am hatevi'ah beveyt din ha'inqvizitzyah."

to Hareuveni and the Jews, but also to Clement and the papacy. In order to accomplish this, Hareuveni accompanies Tsarfati as his mute servant so that he does not reveal his Jewish identity in a country that would immediately put him to death for entering its environs. Thus the intrigue of Pope Clement against a fellow Christian monarchy, in support of his own ambitions that happen to coincide with the benefit of Hareuveni's designs, is one layer of subterfuge.

Another layer of subterfuge can be found in Rojas's use of Tsarfati's presence in Spain. Rojas tells his father-in-law that Tsarfati will treat his "ailment" of rheumatism, but later indicates that the ailment to which he is actually referring is a new attack by the Inquisition on Rojas's and Alvaro's families. Tsarfati will help Alvaro recover from his illness by delivering to him the directions of the lawyer Rojas, in which he tells Alvaro to destroy any documents that show their family connection with Jewish ancestors.

When Rojas tells Alvaro in the letter that Tsarfati has promised to translate *Celestina* into Hebrew because of the beauty of the Hebrew language and because of the work's usefulness, he is really telling Alvaro to keep all of his communications in Hebrew in order to conceal his messages from the eyes and understanding of the Inquisition. Even the word *celestina*, referring to the "holy prostitute," is a code-word for the Catholic church. This code-name is used frequently throughout the communications in ben Nahum's novel to conceal the true intent of the message and to mask references to the church. The story of the clandestine affair between Calisto and Melibea that ended in tragedy is a hidden story about the clandestine existence of the *conversos*, who must hide

their identity and communicate with extreme caution if they do not wish to come to a similar fate. Rojas refers to the death of his father by fire in an auto-de-fe to show that all "confessions" must be kept hidden deep within the individual, that the reality must be kept buried at all times, and that any communication of true identity at any time could prove destructive.

As demonstrated in the section connecting Rojas, Tsarfati, and Hareuveni, ben Nahum skillfully plays with the concepts of language, communication, and hidden meanings with such subtlety that the theme weaves itself thoroughly into the story of the expulsion and the Inquisition. The messianic claimant Hareuveni, in a sense the most pointedly Jewish of all the characters in the novel because of his role as a Jewish messiah, is forced to play the part of a mute just so he can survive in Inquisition Spain. His powerful voice is silenced completely by the Inquisition. Rojas also cannot openly say that which he desires to communicate, but instead has to communicate in hints and code words to escape the "gaze" of the dominant society. Ironically, communicating in Hebrew, the language that is most openly Jewish, is the best way to escape the gaze of the Inquisition, since no Christian in Spain can understand that language. Thus the best way to hide their true identities is to risk using the language that will most identify them with their Jewish people. Tsarfati, having been sent by the pope, has permission to visit Spain as a Jew, but still must exercise great caution because of the antagonism against Jews that exists there. He is able to reveal his Jewish identity more than Hareuveni or Rojas, and acts as a go-between for the Christian pope, while also serving as a go-

between for Rojas and his father-in-law Alvaro, who are maintaining their public Christian identities. Tsarfati, participating in the subterfuge to save Alvaro, must also use language skillfully in order to escape the gaze of the Inquisition.

Through all of these plots and subplots centering on the use of language to conceal, the reader becomes increasingly aware that all will be futile. The symbolic meaning of Gonzales's confession is clear. Although he is hiding his identity behind the partition of the Catholic confession, still his language exposes his fraud. Rojas tells his father-in-law that even if they destroy all evidence from their own records, they will still be unable to expunge the truth that is stored away in the Indexes of the Inquisition. For Gonzales, for Rojas, and for Hareuveni – who eventually also comes to a tragic end – the conclusion is inevitable. The gaze of the dominant culture will triumph. In the end, the coded language will not rescue the Jews from their plight, because they will always end up at some point unintentionally revealing their true identity through their language.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER THREE

The same conclusion awaits the historical Tsarfati as that which awaits the *conversos* in Spain. Notwithstanding all of his efforts to placate his Christian rulers and benefactors, and to play the game by their rules, in the end Tsarfati – not Clement – is the one who is the outsider and the "other", left outside the city walls to perish alone as a pariah. Tsarfati's death by thirst and starvation indicates his aloneness. His death by plague indicates his "unclean" status as a Jew, rejected by the Christian society with which he attempted to associate and collaborate. Tsarfati's end during the 1527 siege of

Rome contrasts with that of Clement. Although Clement does end up losing some wealth and prestige because of the siege, he survives the siege because he is protected within a Christian fort connected to the Vatican. Thus, while Tsarfati was dying because of the rejection of the Christian population, Clement was being harbored and protected by that same force. Tsarfati's own Jewish community did not have the resources to protect him when danger came, most likely because Tsarfati resided in liminal territory, outside of the normal Jewish neighborhoods, but not fully within the Christian community. Thus Tsarfati died as he had lived, in the interstices of society.

Chapter 4 – The Poetry of Tsarfati

INTRODUCTION

Since we know very little about Tsarfati, his poetry is a major key to the understanding of his character and of the environment in which he wrote. What were the themes upon which he focused? To whom did he address his poetry? What forms did his poetry take? Because a poet needs an audience that will read and appreciate his works, Tsarfati's poetic choices will reveal realities about that audience, and about Tsarfati's relationship with that audience. As has been seen in the preceding chapter, Tsarfati was a man with strong connections to Christian society, who sought and received favor from the dominant society that had power to benefit or to destroy him. This meant that in his life and literature, Tsarfati had to be able to communicate convincingly in the forms and themes of both the Jewish and Christian communities. He had to speak convincingly to the Christians in forms and themes that they would understand – that were within their expectation horizon – while demonstrating the ability of the Jewish intellect. Just as importantly he had to speak to his own people in the forms and themes that were familiar to them, while hopefully teaching them some of the forms and themes of their surrounding Christian society, so that they would be better able to interact with that society.

Since none of Tsarfati's non-Hebrew poetry remains for modern analysis, only the descriptions of others can help determine how successfully he communicated with that culture through literature in its own language. As was quoted in the previous chapter,

Valeriano said this of Tsarfati: "Moreover, he had learned Latin well enough to challenge all his contemporaries in Rome in the elegant simplicity of his verse and prose and to compete on an equal footing with all the young men."[319] This description demonstrates just how well Tsarfati had adopted the discourse of the dominant culture, and was able to communicate using its language, forms, and skills "on an equal footing with all the young men."

Another way to evaluate Tsarfati's success in communicating with the dominant regime is by analyzing the forms of his Hebrew poetry. If forms from the Renaissance are found adopted into his Hebrew poetry, then he was successful not only at communicating in those forms in Latin and Italian, but was successful in the more arduous task of translating them and introducing them into another language. That Tsarfati's first known work is a translation into Hebrew of a famous Spanish work from its Italian translation also indicates his abilities in this area.

While it is possible to evaluate Tsarfati's desire to succeed within the dominant Christian culture, it is much more plausible to evaluate his purposes and ability with his Jewish audience, since all of his extant poetry is written in Hebrew to that group. There were many Jewish authors and composers who were content to speak almost exclusively to Jewish audiences, writing in traditional Jewish styles about religious and cultural themes that were interesting to their own people, but that would not have been very intelligible outside of that particular culture. However, the economic needs of individual

[319] Valeriano, *Pierio Valeriano on the Ill Fortune of Learned Men: a Renaissance Humanist and His World*, 111.

Jews meant that they interacted with the dominant culture in many different ways, whether in the area of finance, trade, or crafts. This interaction happened more easily when the individual not only understood the language but also the thought processes of the dominant culture. Understanding those thought processes allowed the Jewish people to compete in the reality constructed by that culture. While the dominant culture did not have a strong need to understand the Jewish sub-culture, except when threatened by it, the Jewish need was clear. Tsarfati, who worked as a diplomat, litterateur, and physician with the highest levels of the Christian religious and political hierarchies, perhaps had a stronger need than any to be able to communicate in that culture. Moreover, like many of his co-religionists, Tsarfati appears to have truly admired at least the ideals of the literary and scientific explosion now called the Renaissance, if not the religious claims of that society.

As will be seen, Tsarfati was able to converse successfully with the dominant Christian culture, but did not make efforts to become an official part of that culture through conversion, nor did he seek to convince anyone in the Christian culture that he was anything other than an educated, intelligent, trustworthy Jew who was of benefit to Christian society. In this he differed from those who had converted to Christianity under pressure of punishment or from desire for reward, such as some *conversos* in Spain, or others in Italy. Although the pressures to convert in Italy were not equal to the pressures in Spain at the time, there were advantages to conversion, as have been discussed in the preceding chapter. Tsarfati chose not to take advantage of these benefits, either by a

pretended or real conversion. Indeed, much of his efforts to be useful to the dominant culture were likely designed not just to benefit himself, but also to convince the Christian hierarchy of the value of the Jewish people as a whole. As a Jewish religious leader, Tsarfati sought to lead them and continued to be a part of and to influence his own people. He only adopted and communicated the Christian discourse that in his mind was adaptable to true Jewish identity, and never communicated the religious Christian discourse of superiority over the Jews. Rather, he worked to subvert that discourse and to warn the Jewish community against it and against the power of the Catholic power to destroy. He worked to undermine the dominant discourse of control that sought to seduce the Jewish community into a belief that Christianity was in reality a superior paradigm.

In this chapter, using the analysis of Tsarfati's poems, I will argue that Tsarfati was a go-between personality who was able to bridge the gap between the two cultures. I will also show that Tsarfati sought to avoid the gaze of the dominant culture and created a subversive discourse that labeled the Christian hierarchy in much the same way that the hierarchy had labeled the Jews. Finally, I will demonstrate, as in the discussion of his life in the preceding chapter, that Tsarfati is a transitionary figure between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, with writings that are characterized by a mixture of current and old forms and themes. In order to make this analysis, I will use the two hundred and thirty-poem *diwan* of Tsarfati found in the Bodleian library at the University of Oxford.[320]

[320] Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati, "*Diwan* of Joseph Tsarfati," in *Manuscript 554/3, formerly Mich. 353* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1527).

ITALIAN FORMS INTO HEBREW – *OTTAVA RIMA* AND THE COMEDY PLAY

An important indication that Tsarfati desired to communicate in the forms of the broader culture include his use of the *ottava rima* form. Tsarfati appears to have been an innovator in this regard, the first to adopt this Renaissance form into Hebrew poetry. By doing so, he was following the example of a long line of Hebrew poets – stretching back to Samuel Hanagid and his adoption of Arabic poet forms in tenth-century Spain – who had introduced the poetic forms of other cultures into Hebrew.

The Italian form *ottava rima* consists of eight-line stanzas in iambic pentameter, each line consisting of eleven syllables. The first six lines are provided with alternating rhymes, with the final two lines in a double rhyme, in this form: a-b-a-b-a-b-c-c. This form of poetry was first used by the famous Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio (1313-1375).[321] He used the form in a number of his shorter poems, as well as in two of his major epic works, Teseide (1340) and Filostrato (1347). His use of *ottava rima* in these epic works seems to have contributed to its adoption in epic works in Italy for the next two centuries, such as its use by Poliziano and also by Boiardo in 1486 in his epic poem, *Orlando Innamorato. Ottava rima* was also adopted outside of Italian, first in English translations of Tasso and Ariosto, but later in original works. The best-known English poem in *ottava rima* is Byron's *Don Juan*, written in 1824.[322] The only other uses of *ottava rima* that are known outside of Italian and English include some early Spanish

[321] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Mark Mussa and Thomas G. Bergin (New York: Signet Classic, 2002), v-xvi.
[322] Helen Child Sargent and George Lyman Kittredge, eds., *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,1904), xxvi-xxviii.

attempts by authors such as Lope de Vega, Yiddish adaptations of the Italian poetry, and the Hebrew versions introduced by Tsarfati.[323] The connection with Spanish and Jewish literature for *ottava rima* is interesting, considering the thesis of this work.

Tsarfati's poem *yeshena 'at* ("You are sleeping") is an excellent example of Tsarfati's use of *ottava rima.* Although a translation of this poem will be seen below, the poem here will only be used to demonstrate Tsarfati's adaptation of *ottava rima* into Hebrew. For the meter of the poem, Tsarfati used the quantitative syllabic form that had been adopted from Italian poetry into Hebrew poetry in the thirteenth century. This form of Italian meter used a consistent syllable count, along with two regular caesuras (or strong pauses) within the lines in order to create a rhythmic impulse. Typically in an eleven-syllable line, the first strong stress or caesura is found on the fourth or sixth syllable, and the last is found on the penultimate or final syllable. The quantitative Italian syllable count, mirrored in the Hebrew, would provide a short syllable on the first, fifth, and ninth syllables, with all other syllables being long. Syllables are considered short when they either contain some form of a *schva*, *hataf*, or a *u*-sound at the beginning of a word (a rendition of the conjunction "and"). I have been more exact in my transliteration of this poem than in other transliterations in this study, in order to show the different lengths of the syllables.

ישנה את אני נעור ונודד

yəshenáh 'át 'aní ne'ór vənodéd (A rhyme, 11 syllables)

[323] Anna Levenstein, "Songs for the First Hebrew Play Tsahut bedihuta dekidushin by Leone de' Sommi (1527-1592)" (Case Western University, 2006), 121.

ומתנמנם סביב ביתך עדינה.

umitnamném səvív beytéch ‘adináh. (B rhyme, 11 syllables)

ישנה את אני צורים אעודד

yəshenáh ‘át ‘aní tsurím ‘a’odéd (A rhyme, 11 syllables)

במכאובי ואחשיך הלבנה.

bəmach‘oví və‘ahshich haləvanáh. (B rhyme, 11 syllables)

ישנה את וזיו מראך ישודד

yəshenáh ‘át vəzív mar‘éch yəshodéd (A rhyme, 11 syllables)

תנומה מבנות עיני ושינה.

tənumáh mibənót ’eynáy vəshenáh. (B rhyme, 11 syllables)

בצלמך כל מזימותי כנוסים,

bətsalméch kól məzimotáy kənusím, (C rhyme, 11 syllables)

וכדונג בתוך אישך נמסים.

vəchadonág bətóch ‘ishéch nəmasím. (C rhyme, 11 syllables)[324]

As can be seen above, each line properly consists of eleven syllables, and the rhyme pattern created by Boccaccio for the *ottava rima* is followed faithfully. Moreover, Tsarfati deftly employed the Italian quantitative-syllabic form. Quantitatively, the poem follows the syllabic pattern described above, with a short syllable on the first, fifth, and

[324] This is poem 82 from Tsarfati’s *diwan.* This poem has been published a number of times, including in Schirmann, *mivhar hashirah ha’ivrit be’italyah*, 224; T. Carmi, ed. *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse* (New York: Penguin Books,1981), 454; and Anna Levenstein, "Songs for the First Hebrew Play”, 121.

ninth syllable of each line (or U -- -- --/U -- -- --/U -- -- //). Rhythmically, Tsarfati placed the caesura on the fourth and final syllables of each line (or - - -/ - - - - - -/), except for missing in line six, where it is found on the third syllable. While the sixth and penultimate syllables were more common in Italian, Tsarfati's use of the fourth and final syllables was typical for Hebrew composers (partially because the accent in most Hebrew words falls on the final syllable).

This poem in *ottava rima* is one of fourteen such poems by Tsarfati.[325] While its themes will be discussed later, Tsarfati's linguistic skill as poet who is able to deftly manipulate the Hebrew language while following Italian forms can clearly be seen by this example. It is possible to begin to see why Spiegel would term Tsarfati "the most engaging poet of the Italian Renaissance."

Tsarfati also employed other popular Italian forms in Hebrew, although he was not the first to do so. His poem *maharu, lechu, banim, veshim'eu 'eli* (Eng. "Come quickly, children, and listen to me"), which he composed to criticize enemies who stole his poetry, was written in the Petrarchan sonnet style, as were four other poems.[326] Each of these contain fourteen lines, which rhyme in the pattern of a-b-b-a, a-b-b-a, c-d-e, c-d-e, the form that was developed by Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374).[327] Each of the lines is again eleven syllables long, continuing in the quantitative-syllabic form that Tsarfati used

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[325] See Almagor, "yosef ben shmuel tsarfati: bibliografyah mu'eret," 111. These are poems 60-62 and 72-92 of Tsarfati's *diwan*.

[326] Ibid. These are poems 38, 122, 128, 216, and 232 of Tsarfati's *diwan*. The poem discussed here, *maharu, lechu, banim, veshim'eu 'eli*, is poem number 38, and can be found in Devorah Bergman, *shevil hazahav: hasonet ha'ivri betequfat harenasans vehavaroq* (Yerushalaim: 1995), 261.

[327] Craig W. Kallendorf, "The Historical Petrarch," *The American Historical Review* 101, no. 1 (1996): 130-41.

elsewhere. According to the pattern provided by Petrarca, the first eight lines form Tsarfati's "proposition," which is that there are evil characters who desire to rob the creators of poetry – in this case Tsarfati – of their beautiful lines, the works of their own hands. The sonnet is concluded with the "resolution" proposed by Tsarfati, which is that these robbers be physically punished and die in painful ways, bereft of the respect of mankind which they have stolen. According to pattern, these two sections make up the argument of the poem. As an aside to this section, it should also be noted that the creation of words is described by Tsarfati in this poem as something of material value, much as gold or silver, and the power to destroy is contained within his own words against the thieves of beautiful language. This theme, of course, fits well with Tsarfati's Renaissance-style love of beautiful language.

Besides employing these new and popular forms, Tsarfati also relied heavily upon Spanish forms of poetry which had been adopted in Italy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and had gained even more popularity as Jews migrated to Italy in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. These forms entered into Hebrew poetic usage from Arabic poetry. The most frequently used by Tsarfati – the Arabic ode form – was also the most commonly used form in Spain. This form consisted of two alternating rhymes throughout the entire poem, a-b-a-b-a-b. There was a quantitative meter that relied on syllable length, but ignored stress. Like in the quantitative-syllabic meters used above, the *schwa, hataf,* and *u* syllables were considered short, and all other syllables were considered long. The line with the A-rhyme was called the *delet* (Eng. "opening"), and

consisted of a pattern of short and long syllables. The line with the B-rhyme was known as the *soger* (Eng. "lock") and would repeat the same pattern of syllables. One example of a typical pattern used by Tsarfati is: U -- -- --/U -- -- --/U -- -- // U -- -- --/U -- -- --/U -- --, with each line consisting of eleven syllables and alternating rhymes. The subject of each pair of lines was parallel.[328]

Tsarfati also used other forms originating in Spain, such as the strophic verse also known as the *muwashsha* (Eng. "girdle") poem. This form consisted of a repetition of the same rhyme – a-b-a-b -- throughout the poem, except for two lines that would repeat with an alternate rhyme – c-c – at regular intervals. These repeating lines acted as a type of "girdle" which bound the poem thematically and phonetically together.[329]

Poetic forms were not the only non-Jewish forms that Tsarfati introduced into Hebrew literature. He seemed desirous to present to his Jewish audience the erudition and new movements that were beginning to exist throughout Europe. Although, as has been discussed in chapter one, *Celestina* is not properly a play as Rojas wrote it, still it is composed in the form of a play. As such, it would be the first play ever written in Hebrew, predating Judah Sommo's play *zahut bedihuta dekiddushin* (Eng. "An Eloquent Marriage Farce") by almost fifty years.[330] Since Rojas termed his work a "comedy", Tsarfati's translation has also been frequently termed the first comedy in Hebrew, although this of course should be understood as the dramatic comedy. Certainly many

[328] There are too many of the Arabic-form poems to list, but they number well over 150 of Tsarfati's more than two hundred and thirty poems. For a few examples, see poems 93-99 of Tsarfati's *diwan.*
[329] These include poems 47-49 and 141 from Tsarfati's *diwan.*
[330] Dan Almagor, "Judah Leone ben Isaac Sommo," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Thomson Gale, 2007), 19:212-17.

medieval works in Hebrew employ a comic air. Tsarfati's desire to bring outside forms into Hebrew literature was likely one of the most important motivations that drew him to translate *Celestina.*

LOVE POETRY

The love poetry of the Renaissance period saw very few innovations or changes in theme and focus from that of medieval times. The ideal of courtly love that existed in medieval poetry continued into the Renaissance, with two possible nuances: 1) the conventions of courtly love were perhaps more deeply entrenched, and 2) the realization of love as a physical experience, often culminating in the successful marriage or physical union of the lovers became more readily possible.[331] However, as discussed in chapter 1, the concept of courtly love was not a new creation in medieval times, but actually seems to have proceeded directly from the influence of Arabic literature, particularly in Spain. From there it was passed on to the Jewish and Christian populations that came into contact with Arabic culture.

Francesco Petrarca has most often been seen as the father of Renaissance love poetry, influencing all those who followed him. The conventions of Petrarca's poetry include:

1) The male poet addresses a lady (such as Petrarca's Laura).

[331] William Bradley Otis and Morriss H. Needleman, *An Outline History of English Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), 228.

2) The female addressed often has a classical name like Stella (Eng. “star”) or Delia (Eng. “warm-hearted”), which can represent a class of women, or a womanly ideal.
3) The poet-lover praises his mistress, the object and image of love, with praise for her superlative qualities using descriptions of beauty frequently employed by Petrarca, such as: "golden hair," "ruby lips," "ivory breast."
4) In discussing the powerful sensations of joy and despair produced by his love, the poet employs contradictory and oxymoronic phrases and images: freezing and burning, binding freedom, etc.
5) The poet-lover dwells only on the subjective experience. Love is not physically fulfilled, hence the poet dwells on the exquisite misery (see number 4) of being in love. Thus the conventional invocation to sleep is at times provided to allay the pain of love.
6) The poet disclaims credit for poetic merits: the inspiration of his mistress is what makes the poetry good, he claims.
7) The poet promises to protect the youth of his lady and his own love against time (through the immortalizing poetry itself).[332]

While these forms do match the poetic pattern provided by Petrarca that was followed by many composers after him, they also ignore the growing convention of the fulfillment of

[332] Ibid., 228-42.

love. Indeed, as will be seen in the next section, physical love had already clearly existed in love poetry during the Middle Ages.

An analysis of two of Tsarfati's love poems will be helpful to determine to what degree Tsarfati followed the conventions popular in the Italy of his time. Tsarfati's love poetry has been described as "the high point of the Renaissance."[333] The first of these is the poem *yeshena 'at,* presented in the section above, whose English translation will be provided here:[334]

1 ישנה את, אני נעור ונודד

2 ומתנמנם סביב ביתך, עדינה.

3 ישנה את, אני צורים אעודד

4 במכאובי ואחשיך הלבנה.

5 ישנה את, וזיו מראך ישודד

6 תנומה מבנות עיני ושנה.

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[333] T. Carmi, ed. *The Penguin Book of Hebrew Verse*, 35.

[334] It should be noted that Tsarfati's manuscript is in some places very difficult to read and decipher.This has caused numerous variations in its interpretations, and some clear errors, which at times are perpetuated in subsequent publications. Mosheh Cassuto, in his article on Tsarfati's introductory poem to *Celestina*, states the difficulty of reading the manuscript in this way, "The collection from which I took this poem is written in a cursive script that is minute and very difficult to read because the forms of the letters differ from each other and they are frequently crowded together. The wording here and there is defective. Sometimes an editor, not much later than the author himself, has corrected this version. However more frequently my corrections were guesses, as can be seen in my notes" See Cassuto, "mishirey yosef ben shemuel tsarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit", 123. Translation mine. As Cassuto indicated, there is more than one writing style in the manuscript, indicating that some or much of the text was recorded by a copyist.

Some of the difficulties in the manuscript will be noted in the following poems. I am grateful to Esther Raizen for her assistance with the manuscript, and for her help in deciphering several difficult passages and words.

7 בצלמך כל מזמותי כנוסים,

8 וכדונג בחום אשך נמסים[335]

1 You are asleep, but I am awake, wandering about,

2 Dozing about your house, graceful one.

3 You are asleep, but I summon cliffs to witness

4 My pain, and I blacken the white moon.

5 You are asleep, but your radiant appearance robs

6 Any slumber and sleep from my eyes.

7 In your image, all my thoughts are gathered,

8 And as wax by the heat of your flame they melt away.[336]

In this poem can be seen some of the popular elements of Italian poetry in Tsarfati's day. The poet's longing for the beloved remains unrealized. The beloved continues asleep, presumably unaware that she is the object of his desire, but certainly unattainable in her sleep. The sleeping form of the maiden enhances her beauty in the eyes of the poet. Her form drives him to distraction, stealing the sleep from his eyes, as does the blinding brilliance of her beauty. Her peaceful state of slumber contrasts with his insomnia, caused by the deep yearnings and pain of his unremitting and unrequited love.

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[335] In the manuscript, there is an extra word recorded in this line, with the two words בתוך and בחום seeming to occupy the same location in the line. This likely indicates that Tsarfati had two choices for this word in the poem, and had not yet decided which to use. The copiest, not knowing which to use, included both. Schirmann, and others such as Carmi following his interpretation, chose to provide only בתוך. However, I prefer בחום, and have included that word in the text of the poem rather than בתוך.

[336] Translation mine, in consultation with English translation in Ibid., 454. This is poem 82 from Tsarfati's *diwan.*

The image of a love-sick man, dreary-eyed from sleep, and walking around the house in a haze of love, yearning and weary, mirrors the emotional exhaustion that he feels, and the dreamlike sense of this poem. The poet's summoning of the cliffs enhances the feeling of a dream-state and creates an interesting shift from the house of the sleeping beloved to an outdoor setting. The cliffs stand dark and silent against the moonlit night, an imposing image, standing as an eternal witness of the sorrow of the poet, just as the poet keeps a sleepless vigil over the body of the maiden. The despair of his heart even causes the dreamlike glow of the moon to be darkened, in part because the beloved is the only image that can cast light upon the poet, and the moon pales beside her glow much as it does in the presence of the sun. Possibly for the sake of his beloved the poet is jealous of the light of the moon, and blackens it so that it won't rob her of any of her inherent luster.

The image of the moon also hearkens to ancient objects of worship, in this case objects which would seek to rival the maiden. The name that the poet uses for her is *tselem* (Eng. "image"), which is the same word often used for false, idolatrous statutes in Biblical literature. And indeed his beloved shows as much movement as a statue, exerting power over him even in her inert, motionless state, partly because he allows his love for her to exercise control over him. *Tselem* is also the word used in Genesis 1:26, "Let us make man in our *image*." With this one word Tsarfati creates a dual tension, inferring a false god, also referring to her with a word that implies she is "the image of god," a god (or goddess) herself. But in this poem she is a distant, unattainable god. He plots (Heb. *mezimotay)* and plans how he can have her (line 7). However, since she is the blinding

light, his thoughts melt like the wax of a candle near a flame as he approaches her. Her very nearness causes the failure and dissolution of his dearest hopes.

The form of the poem enhances the message. At the beginning of lines 1, 3, and 5 -- lines that each end with the a-rhyme *ah* -- Tsarfati repeats "you are asleep," "you are asleep," "you are asleep," maintaining the dreamlike state of the poem and the distance of the beloved, who is unable to respond to the yearning of the poet. Meanwhile the parallel lines 2, 4, and 6 end in the b-rhyme '*oded.* Each of these lines begins with reminders of the pain and sleepy confusion of the lover. Finally the parallel c-rhyme *–im* of the last two lines ties them together. In line 7 all of the thoughts and intrigues of the poet are gathered together around the form of the sleeping one, with final desperate striving to obtain their goal. However, the very focus of thoughts and design that would allow success, instead provides the final blow to the poet's hopes as the nearness leads to dissolution. The rhythmic chiming of the *ottava rima* can almost be heard chanted in the dreamy, sleepy, quiet voice of the poet, until he melts in final oblivion at the end of the poem.

The mirroring of Italian conventions is clear in this poem. The paradoxical sweetness of the pain, made ever worse by the inability of the poet to reach the beloved, fits the thematic guidelines offered by Petrarca perfectly. The poet even seems to address his poem directly to a named lady, in this case *Adinah* (Eng. "graceful one," which could also simply refer not to a proper name but to a description of her delicate features). As in Petrarca's poetry, in this poem physical fulfillment of the love is completely impossible. Indeed, as in the courtly convention, the sleeping state of the beloved places an insurmountable barrier between her and the poet, almost like the barriers that often existed between two social classes.

The word '*adinah* also connects with Isaiah 47:8, which addresses the wicked city Babylon as *'adinah*, "lounging in [her] security," much as the *'adinah* from line 2 is "dozing

about [her] house." Since Isaiah 47 is a condemnation of Babylon, and a prophecy that in the end she will be destroyed for her pride and wickedness, this reference in Tsarfati's poem creates an underlying tension. Although the speaker is attracted to the glowing light of the sleeper's beauty, Tsarfati may be indicating that this obsession is similar to an obsession with Babylon, or with worldly things. This obsession will in the end cause the speaker to melt away, or be destroyed, as in line 8. This subtle undercurrent adds depth and possible religious significance to the poem, in a way that will become more clear in the analysis of other poems below. In short, in Tsarfati's day, the wicked Babylon, lounging about with a lazy splendor that attracted the Jews, would most readily be connected with the dominant Christian society, particularly with regards to the opulence and loose morals that often existed in the papal courts of Tsarfati's day.[337] This one reference in Tsarfati's poem may change the poem into a subtle warning of the dangers of being too attracted to the glories of Christian society. This theme of the idolatry of romantic love, possibly connected to the allure of the dominant culture, has been analyzed in Pleberio's lament, and will be viewed again in connection with Tsarfati's introductory poem to his translation of *Celestina.*

Another of Tsarfati's poems in *ottava rima* maintains the convention of the time of unrequited love. Indeed, unlike Rojas's *Celestina*, Tsarfati's poetry never does allow for the physical consummation of love. Again, the meter and rhyme are impeccable, forming a rhythm that creates a sense of inevitability to the failure of the poet:

1 אהה, כמה מצוא חינך אשבר,

[337] For example, during Tsarfati's liftetime, Alexander VII held a banquet known as the banquet of nuts, which quickly degenerated into a large orgy, with cardinals and political rulers participating alike. See Burchard, *Pope Alexander VI and His Court: Extracts from the Latin Diary of the Papal Master of Ceremonies, 1484-1506*, 38-41.

2 ובמה את פני חסדך אכפר?

3 וכל עת שיר במהללך אחבר,

4 וגדלך בו לכל יבוא אספר.

5 ולה כלב נהי בכיי ישבר,[338]

6 וכליותיו לאבק דק יעפר!

7 ואת שמיר לבבך שמת וערפך,

8 ואזנך אל תחינתי כמשפך.

1 Oh, how will I seek to win your favor!

2 How can I make expiation to obtain your merciful presence?

3 At all times, I compose a song in your praise,

4 Extolling your greatness to all who will gather.

5 Like a heart, the sound of my crying will appeal,

6 And would grind one's bowels to dust.

7 But you have hardened your heart and your neck like a stone,

8 And your ear to my pleas is as a funnel.[339]

This poem opens with words that remind the hearer of a supplicant before God's grace. In the first line the poet yearns for the favor of the beloved. Although Tsarfati here

[338] This is an instance in which the manuscript is difficult to decipher, and various readings have been perpetuated. In this line Schirmann records "ולהב לב" (eng. "the heart burns"), while T. Carmi gives the reading "ולב כלב" (eng. "the heart of a dog"), which would render the line "my tearful cry would break the heart of a dog." A closer examination of the manuscript reveals that the phrase should read as above "ולה כלב", rendering the line "like a heart, the sound of my crying would appeal."

[339] Translation mine in consultation with Ibid., 455-56. This is poem 85 in the *diwan*.

employs the word *hinech* (Eng. "your grace/favor"), a word that has some religious connotation, it is not yet clear at this early point of the poem if Tsarfati will liken his love for the beloved to religious devotion for God. However, the second line carries the imagery forward, as Tsarfati uses another word with strong religious connotation, saying that he will make atonement to enter into her presence (*achaper*), just as faithful Jews in the time of the temple were unworthy to enter into God's presence until atonement had been made for their sins. A large gap in the social status of the poet and the beloved is being developed, as the beloved becomes a source of mercy, grace, and forgiveness, if only the poet can attain her presence. Line 4 maintains the argument, as Tsarfati tells of the songs he has composed to sing praises to the beloved, just as a worshipper would sing praises to the Divine. He will bring together all who are willing to gather (literally *yavo*, or "come up", which is language used when inviting worshippers to temple service) to hear the hymn that Tsarfati has composed. In line 5 and 6 the imagery shifts somewhat, showing the poet as a mourner, clearly unable to enter into the presence of the maiden. The lament of the poet is capable of touching and breaking any heart. And yet the bowels of the divine maiden remain untouched with compassion. Just as God did with the Israelites, so does the maiden harden her heart against the entreaties of the poet. The word *shamir* in line 7 is an allusion to Zechariah 7:12, in which the Lord accuses Israel of having a heart like a stone. The image of the hardened or stiffened neck is also a biblical image referring to obstinacy or rebelliousness. In this poem the roles are reversed, with the beloved, who is in the position of power, behaving stubbornly. Placing a funnel to her

ear in line 8, she is able to shut out his extraneous noise to focus her hearing in more appropriate directions.

The rhyming scheme follows the expected pattern of the *ottava rima*, but plays on phonemes that are so similar as to create a close, building unity throughout the poem. The a-rhyme use *–ber*, while the b-rhyme employs *–per*. Finally, the last two lines of c-rhyme switch to *–pech.* The two items paired by the final c-rhymes works to emphasize the gracefulness of the beloved: *ve'orpech* (Eng. "and the back of your neck") fits well with the image of the funnel – *kemashpech.* Like the previous poem, this poem also plays on Jewish religious themes. Tsarfati is using all of the Italian forms at their finest, but using language and imagery with which his own people will be comfortable, so that he does not exceed their horizon of expectations. He can thereby gain influence with his Hebrew-speaking audience, and also educate them better in the ways of the dominant culture.

These two love poems use varying imagery and rhyme to play upon a similar theme: the beloved is separate from the poet, and it is impossible that the poet will ever win her favor or obtain her presence. He is in pain and agony. The beloved is like a goddess to him, with the power to grant happiness. However, the beloved consistently withholds her affections, dooming the poet to wander in agony. Notwithstanding the elevation of the beloved to the level of the divine, a common convention of Renaissance poetry, Tsarfati's poetry is mild and delicate in tone, and would not have been seen in any sense as being blasphemous or sacrilegious. However, as has been mentioned above, considering his Jewish background and status as a rabbi in the Jewish community,

Tsarfati's consistent return to the theme of worship and/or idolatry in his poetry may provide some hints that this poetry is not to be taken fully at face value. Just as Judah Halevi had sought to pull himself away from his yearning for all the delights of Muslim Spain,[340] Tsarfati may be revealing a subtle warning about the faith-destroying effects of unbridled romantic love. This is particularly instructive when remembering the constant promises of acceptance and hope that members of the Jewish community were being provided by their Christian counterparts.

Bawdy Poetry/Quarrelsome Poetry

In addition to his beautiful poetry about romantic love, Tsarfati was also willing to experiment with bawdy forms of poetry and art. His very translation of *Celestina*, a work full of sexual innuendo and irreligious behavior, indicates that he was again a man of his time. Although western scholars have at times ignored the existence of explicit poetry and literature in the High Middle Ages, there had long been an honored place for clowning, explicit love poetry and humor in Arabic literature.[341] This type of literature had been adopted into Jewish literature during the same Andalusian period that saw the advent of other Arabic forms and their adoption into Jewish usage.

For example, a selection from Judah al-Harizi's *Tahkemoni* (1165-1225) will show how openly and blatantly medieval authors used sexual innuendo to get a laugh from their audiences. In this selection, al-Harizi is cataloguing the exploits of a flea:

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[340] Israel Efros and Histadruth Ivrith of America., *Judah Halevi as Poet and Thinker* ([New York]: Histadruth Ivrith of America, 1941), 184.
[341] Irwin, *Night and Horses and the Desert: An Anthology of Classical Arabic Literature*, 55.

> …Often he hides by the maidens beneath their embroidered cloth,/ going from their loins to their thighs./ He conceals himself between their breasts/ and calls that place the two companies./ When he chances upon a virgin who is not betrothed, / or upon a married woman,/ he clings to her and lies with her/ until his misdeeds make her scream; / and though the maiden cries for help, no one comes to save her. / And should you ask her: "why do you weep? Why do you clamor?" / She replies: "the pitch-black slave came to dally with me / and bedded in my bosom. / My lover is for me a bag of myrrh as he lies on my breast."[342]

This is certainly not the only suggestive scene from *Tahkemoni*, which is full of this type of playful language throughout.

Immanuel of Rome (1261-1328), also adopted the playful, sexual banter that would continue to gain popularity in the Renaissance. Although this type of literature had numerous precursors, as has been shown, Immanuel's works did have an extensive influence during the Italian Renaissance, and particularly among Jewish authors. Tsarfati's poetry from this genre may have owed its initial inspiration to earlier sources, but Immanuel's work was probably its most influential model.

Tsarfati, a rabbi of his time, did not shy away from experimenting in all of the forms of literature readily available to him in his time, including the poem as a joke or riddle with sexual undertones. The example that will be discussed here includes a series of four poems that follow one storyline.[343] In the first poem an aging father calls together his three daughters. He tells them that they are of marrying age, but that he is getting old and needs to determine who will get the majority of his goods when he is gone and the

[342] Translation mine in consultation with al-Harizi, *The Book of Tahkemoni: Jewish Tales from Medieval Spain*, 92-93.

[343] In Tsarfati's *diwan* these are numbers 107-110. For a modern discussion of these poems in Hebrew, see Dan Almagor, "shir hidah 'pornografi' shel rav umeshorer yehudi mehameah ha-16," *Moznayim* 70(1996): 27-30.

best dowry when she is wed. So he proposes a test. He will ask a question and whoever gives the best answer will receive the best reward. Each of the three daughters responds to his question. The first poem develops the body of the riddle, the calling together of the daughters, and concludes with the question of the father. This poem is twelve lines long, with each line in hemistiches, and each hemistich containing eleven syllables. All of the lines end in the same rhyme, the phoneme *–lot*. The form is described to show that convention and strict patterns of poetry are followed even in this type of poem. The odd question that the father asks is: which is older, you or your womb?

The answers of the three daughters reveal how they understood his question, and also the bawdy nature of the poem. The daughters answer by comparing themselves (represented by their mouths), with their wombs. Each of the three answers, recorded as three separate poems, is in the same format as the first poem that contained the father's question. However, the answers are written in couplets, in lines with two hemistiches. Not only do the end-rhymes of the last two lines match, but the end-rhyme of the first hemistich also matches in each case, following a frequently-used Arabic convention. So, the end rhymes of each hemistich in the answer of the first daughter are: line 1 *-nim, -nim;* line 2 *–ni, -nim.* The end rhymes of each hemistich in the answer of the second daughter are: line 1 *–chah, -chah*, line 2 *–mi, -chah.* And the end rhymes in each hemistich in the answer of the third daughter are: line 1 *–tay, -tay;* line 2 *–do, -tay.*[344]

[344] The manuscript of Tsarfati's *diwan* for poem 110, the answer of the third daughter, is difficult to decipher. The rhyme may be *–day, -day; -do, -tay*.

The first daughter answers that she is clearly younger than her womb. Her reasoning is that her mouth has not yet grown any hair upon its chin, but her womb has a beard like an ancient man of years. The second daughter reverses the ruling of the first, stating that she is older than her womb. She proves this by stating that while her mouth is already full of teeth which can chew up her food, her womb has not grown any teeth yet at all.

The third daughter's answer is the most explicit of all. It is positioned as the last answer for a number of reasons. First, its position means that it is the last answer that will be remembered. Its shock value will be enhanced because it is compared with the other two answers. Each of the answers has built upon the willing cooperation of the audience, who have chuckled or laughed out loud with the crude humor of the first two. The third answer is designed to bring the roof down with laughter. The third daughter returns to the position of the first daughter – that she is younger than her womb – but states that her reasons are better and more conclusive than either of the other two responses. She posits that the reason why she is younger than her womb is that the upper mouth ceased to nurse/suckle at its mother's breast long ago, and has grown too old for those practices. However, at the time when the mouth is weaned from suckling, the womb has not yet even begun the practice of suckling, but the time has come for it to do just that.

The sexual reference in this last poem is explicit. The effect is even more shocking when coupled with refined poetic skills and a well-crafted poem. This is not simply part of casual schoolyard behavior. Instead it is purposeful playing, and was most

likely used in a setting in which poets competed with each other for the favor of the audience, either in a type of poetic duel, or in the changing loyalties of their listeners. Voleriano has already expressed that Tsarfati excelled in precisely these types of duels, when he stated that Tsarfati knew Latin: "well enough to challenge all his contemporaries in Rome… and to compete on an equal footing with all the young men." By engaging in this time of artistry, Tsarfati connected himself clearly with the Renaissance movement of his time, which was making this type of literature more and more acceptable.

However, to a certain degree Jewish Andalusian authors preceded Italian Renaissance authors in their boldness in this form. While at first glance it might appear that this poetry connects Tsarfati more closely with the dominant culture of his time, in reality it connected him with both cultures. The Jewish community had an earthy sense of humor that had – at least in some circles – been trained for several centuries to appreciate this type of joke.

Although he was a religious leader in his community, these poems reveal Tsarfati's sense of humor, his humanity, and his desire to excel. Tsarfati's poems show that his personality was fiery, passionate, and expressive. In two of his "love" poems – in this case poems written to women, but criticizing them for rejecting him – he humorously warns that time will take its revenge on the beloved, on whom time will take Tsarfati's revenge, and who will have no power once she is old and ugly.[345] Tsarfati's strong personality is also expressed in the numerous poems that he wrote in which he responded

[345] See Schirmann, *mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 226, 228.

heatedly to his critics and opponents. There are at least thirty of this type of poem in his *diwan.*[346] His introduction to his translation of *Celestina* also contains a warning to those who criticize him, as will be seen below. One poem likely indicates that there was some friction within the community.[347] In it Tsarfati describes one who has sought to destroy him by catching him in a trap. However, Tsarfati proclaims that this man will fall in the net himself. Interestingly, this poem seems to refer to one of Tsarfati's illnesses, and emphasizes the challenges which he faced in his life – Tsarfati states that there are those who have longed for his death because of his illness (Heb. *'asher 'avah tmutati becholyi*). Although he served as a religious leader of his people, his connection with them was not without difficulties. It is possible, and is supported by his introductory poem to *Celestina*, that Tsarfati's relationship with Christian society, and his knowledge of the culture and literature of the dominant culture, caused some of these misunderstandings. In serving as a go-between, Tsarfati possibly ensured that he was, at least to a certain degree, on the outside of both communities. Through all of these poems, Tsarfati emerges not as a dry, historical figure, but instead as a man with a tumultuous life, with strong opinions and feelings that were often expressed in his poetry. His poems show him to be one who loved the ideal of romantic love, who felt insults and challenges keenly, and who played with language in humorous ways in order to please his audience.

[346] These include poems 11, 13, 14, 21, 26, 30, 32, 36, 39, and others from Tsarfati's *diwan*.
[347] This is poem 168 from the *diwan*.

Perhaps the best poem to illustrate Tsarfati's fiery personality, and possibly also his playful, competitive nature is Poem 114, entitled in the manuscript "An Arousing Poem Concerning a Debate" (Heb. *shir me'orer 'al haviku'ah*.)

1) קום ריב איתי איש מלחמתי אדרוך קשתי אריק חרבי

2) יהיו כלי מבחר מילי צא נא אלי הלחם בי[348]

1) Arise! Debate with me / man of my battle. / I will draw my bow; / I will unsheathe my sword.

2) Words will be / the tool of choice. / Go forth, I pray, against me / and fight against me!

In this clever poem, Tsarfati rhymes the end-consonant of the first three sections of each line, and then slightly alters the end-sound of each line so that the two lines rhyme with each other, so: line 1 reads — *-ti, -ti, -ti, -bi*; while line 2 reads – *-li, -li, -li, -bi*. It is difficult to know whether Tsarfati speaks in earnest anger, seeking to draw out a real opponent into an angry debate so that he may defeat his hidden enemy, or whether he speaks playfully, boasting of the power of his words. Line 1 alludes to Exodus 15:9, in which the biblical poet quotes Pharaoh as saying, "I will pursue, I will overtake, I will divide the spoil; my lust shall be satisfied upon them; I will draw my sword (Heb. *'ariq harbi*), my hand shall destroy them." In the Exodus story Tsarfati is alluding to, the listener knows, as Tsarfati's audience would have known, that the arrogant, over-reaching Pharaoh was doomed to failure and humiliation. The same is true in an allusion in Line 2

[348] This poem, number 114 from Tsarfati's *diwan*, has not previously been published.

to Judges 9:38. In this verse, the losing side cries, "Go forth, I pray now, and fight with them" (Heb. *tse-na' 'atah vehilachem bo*.)

Why did Tsarfati, a skilled poet and biblical scholar, choose to connect his position biblically to the losing side? The setting of the medieval literary salon, in which poets came together to compete in verse, seems to fit well the tone of this poem, and the most logical interpretation for this poem is that Tsarfati is speaking playfully in front of an audience. In Line 2 Tsarfati indicates that the weapon of choice will be words. While this could indicate a real debate, with high stakes and debilitation consequences in public opinion for the loser, Tsarfati's choice to connect himself to those who will be vanquished seems to indicate instead a less crucial situation. If so, then Tsarfati's boastful, self-vaunting words would be balanced by the implied connection to other arrogant speakers who were completely unaware of their own future defeats. This skillful allusion would have gained a laugh from the crowd, and would have earned Tsarfati points in the poetic contest of public opinion. While Tsarfati was certainly capable of reverence and devotion, he was also a man of the people, capable of anger and quick humor as he believed the occasion warranted. Most importantly, as will be seen immediately below, Tsarfati cherished the power of words, and used them skillfully in the war for public opinion.

LOVE OF LANGUAGE AND BOOKS

One of the primary innovations of the Renaissance period was the love of language for its own sake and beauty. As was discussed in chapter one, the discovery of

classical texts that focused on the art of oratory had sparked a new interest in beautiful, persuasive speech. Although medieval times were not devoid of linguists, particularly in medieval Spain, these linguists were mostly interested in the "elevated languages" of Hebrew, Latin, and Arabic. In addition, European areas outside of Spain were often more intent on the struggle to survive, rather than concerned with the cultures and languages of other countries. When trade began to increase in the thirteenth century, the increased contact with other areas led to augmented knowledge of languages such as Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and others. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Italy and elsewhere the focus on beautiful language was especially strong with regards to the local tongue, such as Italian in Italy or Spanish in Spain, in contrast to the official language of the church which had held the pre-eminent place for so many centuries. Martin Luther's theological revolt, with his subsequent translation of the bible into German in 1522, was completed during Tsarfati's lifetime and reflected the exuberant new focus on the language of the common man.[349] While Hebrew was not the vernacular of the Jewish people, it did unite them across national boundaries as the vernacular of the communities among which they lived – such as Italian – allowed them to communicate with those societies. Additionally, Hebrew had never been the property exclusively of Jewish leadership, as Latin had been for the Christian hierarchy, and therefore did not have the same negative backlash as Latin did.

[349] Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 239.

Tsarfati's love of language ties him closely to his place and time, but also unites him across space with a similar focus in the writings of Rojas. This love was evident in the praise offered Tsarfati because of his skills in Latin, Greek, and other Mediterranean languages. These language skills not only assisted Tsarfati to excel in the popular medium of his time, but also allowed him to serve more effectively as a go-between for the Jews and the dominant society. Tsarfati was a skilled spokesman, wielding language deftly to represent the Jewish needs, and using it in turn to influence his own community.

Possibly the strongest impetus to the new focus on the beauty of language was the printing press, that allowed words to be replicated rapidly, and provided what must have seemed to the people of the time a miraculous burst of language. Not only could the very rich obtain copies of famous manuscripts from far-away lands, but these books could be printed and made available to even those of modest means. Writers now had a new means of monetary compensation. Instead of being rewarded only by rich patrons for their skills, they had a new means of reward through the printing presses which would pay for their work. Knowing that their works might have wide dissemination, authors and composers placed special emphasis on beautiful compositions, so that the audience would be willing to buy. While a tradition of oral poetry continued in Tsarfati's day, reading from the printed page gained more and more popularity.

The Jewish community in Rome witnessed the first printings in Hebrew in 1475,[350] and the first edition of Daniel Bomberg's Hebrew bible did not follow until

[350] Roth, *The History of the Jews of Italy*, 262.

1517.[351] Books printed in Hebrew were rapidly purchased, finding a community ready to purchase not only in Italy, but across the Mediterranean, and particularly in Europe.[352] This opened the way for further printings and further creations of Hebrew works, such as Tsarfati's translation of *Celestina*.

The only extant works of Tsarfati that were definitely published during his lifetime, with the evidence remaining in printed books, are the introductory poems that he penned in praise of the second edition of the *Biblia Rabbinica* in his day.[353] A number of other poems exist that were written to be published as introductory poems to other books, but no copies of these books exist today, and the possibility must remain that they were never published.[354] However, Bomberg's *Biblia Rabbinica* did provide Tsarfati with paid work. Ann Brener colorfully describes Tsarfati in Bomberg's printing workshop, amid the bustle of a new printing. As she states it:

> Perfect as this picture is, however, we might add yet one other figure to this bustling scene of work, and that is the figure of a Hebrew poet deeply intent on his poem, perhaps off in a corner somewhere, out of the hustle-and-bustle of the workroom, tapping syllables with his fingers and counting out vowels. Whether he was wearing the yellow badge of the Venetian Jew or had availed himself of Bomberg's measures to free his Jewish craftsmen from this public sign of obloquy

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[351] Ann Brener, "A Poem by Joseph Sarfati," in *Tradition, Heterodoxy and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva, Israel: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 265. See also Y. S. Penkower, "mahadurat hatanakh harishonah shehotsi bomberg la'or," *Kiryat Sefer* 58(1983): 586-604.

[352] For discussions on the popularity and content of early Hebrew printing, see Marvin J. Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); D. W. Amram, *The Makers of Hebrew Books in Italy* (New York, 1909); J. Bloch, "Venetian Printers of Hebrew Books," in *Hebrew Printing and Bibliography*, ed. C. Berloin (New York, : 1976), 67-70.

[353] These are poems 68-70 in Tsarfati's *diwan*.

[354] Dan Almagor, "shirim 'al sefarim leyosef ben shmuel tsarfati," in *Asufot Kiryat Sefer (A Supplement to Kiryat Sefer 68)*, ed. Y. Rosenberg (Jerusalem: Bnei Berith, 1998), 21-36.

> we will have to leave to the imagination of our readers. But to such a poet we can give a name…: Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati.[355]

Although Brener appears unaware that Tsarfati early on was proclaimed free of the restrictive Jewish dress code, and had this privilege repeated at least one other time during his life, her description of his "counting of syllables" is certainly accurate and picturesque, as Tsarfati strove to perfect the rhythm of his work.

In writing introductory poems, Tsarfati was again following the popular mode of his time. Early Italian humanists began a new trend in this area with the advent of printing. They added accompanying verses to issues edited by themselves or their friends, or to their own productions. As has been seen, Rojas followed this same pattern in his poetic introduction to *Celestina*, even repeating his own name in an acrostic, as had become popular in these types of poems. These early Renaissance scholars and poets wrote in Latin, of course,[356] but Hebrew authors very early on began to offer contributions for Hebrew printings. The first of these can be found in 1475, with a poem of the new art of printing at the end of the first printed Hebrew book, the '*arba'a turim* (Eng. four rows) by Rabbi Jacob ben Asher.[357] Two years later the first printed Hebrew Psalter also concludes with a brief poem of praise of printing, and the list goes steadily on.

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[355] Brener, "A Poem by Joseph Sarfati," 267.

[356] K. Haebler, *The Study of Incunabula* (New York, 1933).

[357] See Heller, *The Sixteenth Century Hebrew Book: An Abridged Thesaurus*, 11. As found in Heller, the *'arba'a turim* was printed by Meshullam Cusi and Sons in Piove di Sacco, 1475 (Goff Heb 28; Thes A.13; S-T. C. 24); and the Psalter was printed by Hijar in 1478, with three peoms at the end (Goff Heb 19; Thes B11; S-T. C. 228).

This trend continued to increase over time. England, for example, saw 32 commendatory poems for 22 books that were printed from 1478-1520, while the decade of 1631-1640 saw the publication of now fewer than 1100 such poems for 293 books. However, it was during the 1520s that the new trend truly "caught on among humanists", and in printing Tsarfati's poem at the beginning of his edition Bomberg thus proves that in this matter, as in so many other aspects of his work, he had his hand well on the pulse of contemporary publishing trends.[358]

Tsarfati's poems are found together at the beginning of the *Biblia Rabbinica* of 1525, much like the introductory poems of Rojas in *Celestina.* The first poem contains ten lines of rhymed Hebrew prose. It is followed by the main poem, which will be described below. The final poem contains six brief lines, again in praise of the edition. The rhymed prose of the first poem is characterized by passages without any type of rhythm, meter, or set length. Each short phrase in the poem ends with a rhyme that is replicated in the following short phrase. The rhyme may be repeated as often as the composer wishes, and then is traded for a different rhyme (perhaps simply as a function of the previous rhyme no longer fitting). Although this type of poetry had early on been modeled by Judah al-Harizi in *Tahkemoni,* the most recent and popular Hebrew composer to employ the method was Immanuel of Rome, in his *Mahbarot*. This is a collection of

[358] F. B. Williams, "Commendatory Verses: The Rise of the Art of Puffing," *Studies in Bibliography* 19(1966): 3-11. Page 3 has a table listing the numbers of books and poems decade by decade from 1478 to 1640, reaching a grand total of 4,748 poems for 1,472 different books.

rhymed-prose stories interspersed with metrical poems from early fourteenth-century Italy.[359]

This first poem sets up not only the book, but also prepares the audience for Tsarfati's middle poem, which is written in classic ode format, following the model of Muslim Spain, with a continuous end-rhyme, lines of two hemistiches, and perfect quantitative meter. However, similar to other poems by Tsarfati, it is even more structured than the typical Hebrew ode from Muslim Spain. For example, this middle poem also begins and ends with the same line, envelope fashion, like two bookends. Although this device was not unknown in Muslim Spain, here it is especially effective because it mirrors the nature of the rabbinic bible, which is cyclical and non-ending. Tsarfati also includes an acrostic poem in the poem, providing his full name. It has been argued that this type of acrostic became popular after the advent of printing so that authors could protect their own creations. Anyone could add their name to a work. However, it was effectively impossible to erase the name of an author found in acrostics in the work itself, without at the same time destroying the nature of the poem and of necessity beginning anew.[360] This acrostic connects with the same device in Rojas's introductory poem. Interestingly, Rojas failed to include an acrostic in his first edition, but included it in the second. Possibly as time progressed this pattern gained more

[359] Immanu'el ben Solomon Haromi, *Mahbarot* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1957). Other examples of rhymed prose and a bibliography on this form in Hebrew and Arabic exist in Ann Brener, *Judah Halevi and His Circle of Hebrew Poets in Granada* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 29-30.

[360] C. Brown, *Poets, Patrons, and Printes: Crisi of Authority in Late Medieval France* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995). Brown notices a shift that occurred in the relations between author, printer, and audience in the early sixteenth century, and points out that with the advent of printing authors sought greater control over their literary property.

popularity and was brought to Rojas's attention, while it may not have been available to him as a literary technique in the first edition. Tsarfati's acrostic is lengthy and intricate, like that of Rojas, stating by connecting the first letter of each line together: אני יוסף בן הרב רבי שמואל צרפתי, זצ"ל, חזק! (Eng. "I am Joseph the son of the rabbi, Rabbi Samuel Tsarfati, may his righteous memory be blessed. Be strong!")

The reader had been prepared for this acrostic in line 29-33 of the first poem, in which Tsarfati states: "At the beginning of each line my name and that of my father is inked / and on the margins of the book written and sealed. / He who seeks after my name / or asks after my well-being / will find me at the entrance to my home: / and there may speak with me."[361] *(bera'shey batav shemi veshem 'avotay nichtam / ve'al shuley hasefer nichtav venehtam / uva'al be'ami/ mevaqesh 'al shemi / vedoresh bishlomi / petah beyti yimtsa'eni / vesham yedaber 'imi)* (lines 29-33). The Hebrew transliteration is given to show the nature of the rhymed prose. Thus Tsarfati's name stands at the entrance to the poem, or in each line of the poem; and the poem stands at the entrance to the Bible, and can be read with satisfaction by all in the Jewish community. Tsarfati indeed can be found "at the entrance to [his] home," writing about books and language in the poetic manner of his own "home" language of Hebrew.

Tsarfati's injunction to "be strong" briefly introduces a subject that will become more apparent later on: when Tsarfati wrote in Hebrew, he did so specifically for a

[361] Poem number 68 in Tsarfati's *diwan*. Translation mine, in consultation with Brener, "A Poem by Joseph Sarfati," 276.

Hebrew-speaking audience, his own traditional audience.[362] In an age when very few Christians read Hebrew, and most did so only to find flaws in the Jewish religious texts, the Jewish audience was by far the most likely to read Tsarfati's Hebrew writings. Tsarfati here lightly alludes to the challenges that are constantly present when living in a community under the watchful gaze of the dominant culture. The allusion is light, unobtrusive, and inoffensive in case the gaze of Tsarfati's Christian audience should happen to make the effort to read it and understand the acrostic. Who should be strong? – those who will be buying the Hebrew *Biblia Rabbinica*. Why do they need to be strong? – because they live in a world full of societal challenges that encourages them to abandon their religious faith and traditions. These are the faithful Jews who would purchase the bible, and with whom Tsarfati would wish to cautiously communicate in a mildly subversive discourse.

A biblical allusion is hidden in the acrostic mentioned above. Tsarfati's statement, "I am Joseph," would have created an instant connection in his Jewish audience to Joseph of Egypt's statement in Genesis 45:5, when he reveals himself to his brothers, saying "I am Joseph, your brother." Joseph of Egypt had been put in a position of high influence by the gentile Pharaoh, and because of this he was able to save his people in the foreign land of Egypt, a land that forever after would symbolize the gentile world to the Jews. In the same way, Tsarfati had been placed in a position of influence by the highest authority in

[362] The injunction to "be strong" is a traditional ending in many Jewish communities after reading each of the Pentateuch. In a poem introducing the *Biblia Rabbinica*, the statement is especially appropriate, and would have fit into the expectation of horizons of Tsarfati's audience, preparing them for the upcoming readings.

Christianity, and was thus able to have a saving influence for his people. In lines 15-17 of the opening poem, Tsarfati states the allusion even more clearly, writing "When, in the exile of Rome, its letters were revealed as signs imprinted across the sky…then I, Joseph, your brother, said to my lips, Do not be silent!" (Heb. *uchehigalot bagalut beromah 'ototav ke'otot harutot bashamayim… / 'ani yosef 'ahichem / 'amarti lisefatay 'al domu lachem!*) Tsarfati's statement, translated here, "I, Joseph, your brother," mirrors exactly the Hebrew of Genesis 45:5, and could also be translated "I am Joseph, your brother," if the context allowed. Tsarfati connects this statement in line 17 to the surprise that this revelation of God's word occurred in the exile in Rome (line 15). Rome was also a land that, like Egypt, had come to symbolize the gentile world. Thus, in a few simple lines, Tsarfati connects himself to Joseph of Egypt, placing himself in a position of authority and influence, and he emphasizes an important biblical parallel to his Jewish people, that God is once again working his salvation for the Jews in a foreign land.

Tsarfati's repeated focus on the beauty of language, and his joy in the creation of printing, is evident in each of the three introductory poems. Although his words are in print, he is aware of his audience and desires to give voice to the words, describing them as audible: "from one end of the of the heavens to the other / I will sing (Heb. '*aron)* the news / I will read forth from my sinews (lit. from my throat, Heb. *vegaron*). (line 2-3)" Here Tsarfati hearkens to the tradition of reading the text aloud, although it is found in print and can be read silently. He later describes the words of the book as "sweeter than honey and abundant nectar / … to serve as a great feast / … a double portion for their

meal" (Heb. *metuqim midevash venofet tsufim / ... 'eved lechem rav / ... lechem mishneh lefi 'ochlam*) (lines 7-9). Still further on, Tsarfati turns to the beauty of the language as printed upon the page, rather than in *voz alta*, and claims the language is "a delight to the heart and a desire to the eye" (Heb. *hemdah lalevav veta'avah la'eynayim*) (lines 16-17). Tsarfati rejoices in his own skill and ability in poetry and oratory, stating "I am Joseph your brother! I said to my lips 'Don't be silent!' (Heb. *'ani yosef 'ahichem / 'amarti lisefatay 'al domu lachem*) (line 17). He then refers to the popular Arabic forms from which he obtained the meter for his poems, connecting himself clearly with the culture and influences of his day: "Behold! A company of Arabic meters streamed from the opening of my mouth to stand forth" (Heb. *vehineh lahaqat mishqeley ha'aravim / yats'u fetah sefatay nitsavim*) (lines 21-22).

The main/middle introductory poem contains just as many references to the importance of language. However, in this poem it is the Talmud that speaks, and the praise refers more to the power of the word of God than to the power of artistic device. This poem will be analyzed more completely in the next section.

JOSEPH TSARFATI AND JEWISH SOCIETY

As has been stated elsewhere, Tsarfati's status in Jewish society was significantly different than that of Rojas. While Rojas's family had converted to Christianity, Tsarfati – who admittedly experienced significantly less pressure than Rojas's ancestors – had stayed faithful. While Rojas was part of a vast group of *conversos* with varying characteristics, many of whom felt great bitterness at their situation in life and a sense of

ambivalence and skepticism toward any religious certainties, Tsarfati was instead part of a Jewish community that had chosen to maintain its traditional identity. Rojas did not speak directly to the religious values of this Jewish community in his work, mostly because that community by external definition no longer existed in Spain. Rather he spoke to the bitterness of a religious and communal reality that had been destroyed by the dominant culture.

As will be seen below, Tsarfati also spoke to a religious community that had received deep abuses from the dominant culture. In Tsarfati's home country the gaze of the dominant Christian culture, while at times more benevolent than that of Rojas's surroundings, was just as powerful. This gaze exerted tremendous power on the Jewish community, altering the way that the community dressed, lived, and communicated. However, the community still existed as an observable whole. While many had been enticed or coerced into conversion, many more had retained their traditional identity. Thus, to speak with them Tsarfati needed to speak to that traditional religious identity. This meant most importantly that he needed to show a real reliance on biblical themes and skill in alluding to those themes frequently in his writings. This skill and religiosity in his poetry – along with the observation of traditional Jewish norms such as keeping the laws of the Sabbath and of *kashrut* – would speak to his Jewish audience more than anything else that Tsarfati could say. If he was able to use Jewish religious texts with facility and agility in his writings, then Tsarfati's writings and poetry could be accepted by his Jewish audience, and Tsarfati could be accepted as part of that community. In this

I do not infer that Tsarfati did not use these traditional forms sincerely; I only claim that using these forms also allowed him to continue to be an accepted voice in his Jewish society.

Thus Tsarfati's ability to write in Hebrew provided assistance with Jewish audience on at least two levels. First, as the traditional language of Jewish religious discourse, it demonstrated Tsarfati's faithfulness to his own tradition. Second, as a language that was challenging for even the best of non-Jewish Hebraists in Tsarfati's day, Hebrew was an effective means of masking one's discourse from the gaze of the dominant culture. While Tsarfati could not be sure that this culture would not take the time to translate and understand his Hebrew words, he could at least be sure that his Hebrew poetry would be ignored by the vast majority of the Christian audience. On the other hand, the Jewish community's ability to communicate through allusions to their Hebrew scriptural texts with a facility that no Christian scholar of the time would be able to match meant that Tsarfati was able to "code" his discourse. By using carefully-chosen phrases, Tsarfati could immediately call the minds of his Jewish audience to references and stories that contained a deeper meaning than his words alone, and that provided a context for what he placed in his poetry. These types of allusions had been used by the Jewish community for thousands of years.

The final two sections of this chapter, then, will deal with Tsarfati as a religious composer of poetry who communicated with his Jewish audience in ways with which they were familiar, and with Tsarfati as an author of coded messages. Like Rojas, Tsarfati

had to communicate with both his Christian and Jewish societies as a type of go-between. Both had to use extreme skill in order to survive in the dangerous climates in which they lived. Both effectively survived in those climates, although Tsarfati, who stayed connected to his religious traditions, eventually was excluded and died alone and outside of his home city, perhaps in part because he had not abandoned those beliefs and ideals. Rojas, on the other hand, survived and died in his own home, successfully maintaining until the end the identity that he and his family were forced to adopt in order to survive in sixteenth-century Spain.

Religious themes

Approximately twenty poems in Tsarfati's *diwan* are overtly religious. Three of them were written in praise of God, three were written regarding Maimonides' thirteen principles, seven were written for specific Jewish holidays, one was written as a lament over Jerusalem, and another seven were written on mixed themes, such as his praise for the *Biblia Rabbinica* printed by Bomberg.[363] However, although relatively few of his poems were overtly religious, these few reveal of depth of commitment that highlights Tsarfati's connection to his traditional community. Additionally, most of the rest of his poems contain multiple allusions to Jewish religious texts that further enrich their meanings.

In this section, I will analyze religious themes from Tsarfati's poem introduced above, the main or middle poem that introduced Bomberg's *Biblia Rabbinica*. In this

[363] See Almagor, "yosef ben shmuel tsarfati: bibliografyah mu'eret," 111.

poem, Tsarfati speaks through the voice of the Torah to encourage his people to seek after the wisdom and beauty found in that book. While his previous poem boasted of his beautiful Arabic meters and his facile use of language, this poem's praises are all for the Torah and for its printer, Daniel Bomberg (although the form of the poem itself was that first made popular by adopting Arabic poetic customs).

1 אן תצעדי עדה באל נושעת אן תצעדי מזה לבקש דעת

נבון בכליותי מעון בינות ויד לי עד שמי המעלות נוגעת

יוצרי יצרני כלילת הוד ושם בי ממקור חיים באר נובעת

ידו בשפע כל שלמות כוננה אותי באין יתרון ולא מגרעת

5 ואהיה יום יום אני אמון בחיק סודו מצחקת ומשתעשעת

סודו בחיקי שם בטרם דוק יהי סובב והארץ תהי שוקעת

פדה בחמלתו קהלתו אשר היתה לפרעה אז בנוף נכנעת

בזכות אבותיה לסיני קרבה הוא יענה קולו והיא שומעת

נצח למאז צור נתנני כעץ דעת עלי לבם אני נטעת

10 היו ענפי צל ופריי החייה נפש בסכלות נודדה גוועת

ראשי כמו רמים וידי משאול תמשוך גוית איש בבור טובעת

בי ישבו מושב אלהים אוהבי כי מתהום נפשם לרום נוסעת

רבים בתבל עם משולים לחמור הסר משוך אפסר כסוי מרדעת

בי יעטו מוסר בדוברי בם ועת עתים להשלימם אהי קובעת

ישאו בציץ אותי בנזם בענק בעגיל ובצמידים ובטבעת

שלום במשכני ולצדיק אני אצדיק ולרשע אני מרשעת

מואס במחמדי כשסע בחרי אריה גדי נפשו אהי שוסעת

ובחושקי הריק חנית אריק אשר נפשם כמוכת שוא ובמנוגעת

איומה אשר תחמוד ביופיי תעמוד תאבד אשר חקי תהי פורעת

לי אז לצורר צר לכל ציר לי צרי נפש אני כל קובעי קובעת

צא עם אלהים וחזה בי יום אני הדר והוד על היקום שופעת

ריב עם ילדי לי הכי כל גוי וכל אמה לפני סוגדה כורעת

פתאום עזבוני בני בטני כאם חיק מילדיה ושד מונעת

תורה אני מורה להלבין חטא ואם אדם כשנים הוא וכתולעת

יסד נדיב לב סוד יסודתי ושם אותי בקצוות היקום נודעת

זרח לבית בומב"ירג ודניאל שמו נפש חסידיו לו לבד נרצעת

צדקת אלהים פעלו ידיו לזאת לו אהיה תמיד באל פוגעת

לו יד בניב קדש וכמעט כל שפת בלתו בחוג המאמר צולעת

חושו קנו חיים בני אל חי תנו לבב לדובקה בי ויד פורעת

זכרו אשר נפש מתי כילות לאל תמיד כחוטאה היא וכמתעתעת

קנין חמודותי עדת עמי קני אם מאלהים את זכות תובעת

עשרים וארבעה ספרים חוקקו יחד במכתב דק ובמרובעת

אותות בעט ברזל חדשים חרתו אין מורדה בהם ואין פושעת

כלם מתורגמים ובמסרה סביב כל דף מכופלת בזר נרקעת

כלם מנוקדים בטעמי חן אשר נעם נגינתם לרום בוקעת

רש"י ובן עזרה מפרשים בם הלא ידם לשערת האמת קולעת

בן-גרשון בקצת והקמחי לראש המדקדקים צניף עלי מגבעת

הרפ"ה שנת צאתי בויניציה לאור העיר אשר ארץ וים רוגעת

עורי קהילתי ורוצי אחרי הפוסחה על שוא ומרועעת

לא תזוזי כי עוזבי בבני אנוש מיץ לענות לעו מלא קובעת

עד אן חסרת בין בחוכמות כוזבות תשתכרי יום יום כמשתגעת

אם לא תמהרי חיש ואלי תצעדי אן תצעדי עדה באל נושעת.

1 Where are you going, O community whose salvation lies in God?

Where will you go from here to seek after knowledge?

2 Wise in my reins, the abode of understanding, and my hand

Reaches to touch even the heavens on high.

3 My creator formed for me a crown of splendor and placed

In me, from the Fountain of Life, a flowing well.

4 His hand in abundance prepared in me every perfection

With neither over-abundance nor deficiency.

5 As the days passed I gained strength, within His bosom

Secreted, laughing and entertained.

6 His own secret he lay in my bosom ere the sky
First revolved and the earth descended.

7 In His mercy He redeemed his congregation that
Was then subjugated in Noph to Pharaoh.

8 By the virtue of her fathers she drew nigh to Sinai.
He answered with His voice, and she heard.

9 From that time to eternity the Rock has placed me as a tree
of knowledge, planted over their heart.

10 My branches gave shade, and my fruit gave life
To the soul in ignorance wandering, dying.

11 My head was unto the heights, and my hand from She'ol
Would draw the body of the man who in the mire has expired.

12 In me, those who love me sit, the assembly of God,
For from the chasm their soul will journey on high.

13 Many in the world are a people like the ass:
Turn away from pulling the halter, and from the saddle cloth!

14 By me they enwrap themselves in reproof, when I speak of them and when the time comes for me to judge them.

15 They wear me as a miter, as a nose-ring, as a necklace,
As an earring, as bracelets, and as a ring.

16 There is peace in my tabernacle; with the just I

Deal justly, and the wicked I condemn.

17 He who despises my delights I will rend in pieces.

As a lion upon a goat in wrath, so will I tear his soul.

18 When I feel the desire I will uncover my spear and will hit

Those whose soul is afflicted by vanity.

19 He who is reverent and delights in my excellence will stand;

He who makes wreckage of my statutes will be lost.

20 I have power to bring wrath against the enemy; and I have a remedy for every pain;

I establish every soul that establishes itself in me.

21 Go forth with God and contemplate me in the day I

Abundantly provide splendor and majesty over all things.

22 I have a quarrel with my children, for every nation, and every

People before me bends to kneel;

23 But the children of my womb hasten to abandon me like a mother

Who withdraws her lap and her milk from her babes.

24 I teach the Torah, to make sin white, though

It be red as rubies and scarlet.

25 One of noble heart established the secret of my foundation;

And spread the knowledge of me throughout the universe.

26 One shone forth in the house of Bomberg, and Daniel was his name.

The spirit of his followers are fastened to him alone.

27 His hands work the righteousness of God, and for that

I will always give thanks to God.

28 He has power in the holy language; almost every other tongue

Beside his limps in the sphere of speech.

29 Hurry! Acquire life, O sons of the living God. Turn

Your heart and sinful hand, and cling to me entirely.

30 Remember that the miserly soul is as one dead to God,

Always as a sinner and as one who deceives.

31 Purchase my hidden charms, O my people. Purchase,

If you demand credit from God!

32 Twenty-four books were engraved

Together in a fine and square print,

33 Letters newly chiseled with a pen of iron;

Among them there is not a rebel nor a law-breaker.

34 Each of them translated and in the *masorah* around

Each page multiplied and hammered out as a wreath.

35 Each of them pointed with graceful marks of cantillation whose

Pleasing rendition pierces the heavens.

36 Rashi and Ibn Ezra are presented in them, Does not

Their hand with exactness split the hair of truth?

37 Gersonides at the foot, and Kimhi at the head;

The linguists as a crown upon a turban.

38 1525 is the year I was published in Venice,

The peaceful city by land and sea.

39 Awake, o my congregation! Run after me,

Passing over emptiness and evil!

40 Do not stray, for those who forsook me among the sons of men

Have fully drunk poisoned wine from the goblet.

41 How long will you lack understanding, in false wisdom

Day after day inebriated like a fool?

42 If you do not hurry with speed, and to me go forth,

Where will you go, O community whose salvation lies in God?

Tsarfati's masterful rhyme and meter are clear in this beautiful poem. Each of the forty-two lines ends with the syllable *'at*. Each has twelve syllables in the first hemistich and eleven syllables in the second. In each hemistich the short syllable falls on the third and seventh syllable. Frequently the first hemistich also contains a short vowel on the eleventh syllable. The rhyme and meter is impeccable.

Not only did Tsarfati deftly follow the Arabic form that he had chosen, he also used plays on words and repetition of sounds to increase the flow and attractiveness of the spoken verse. For example, in line 36, he states that "Rashi and Ibn Ezra are presented in them." The Hebrew word that he uses for "presented" or "explicated" is the

same word that came to be used as a name or title for the famous Jewish medieval commentators. Thus when Tsarfati uses the Hebrew word *mefarshim*, he is not only stating that the words of these scholars are provided in the pages, but is also classifying who the scholars are.

In line 18: "Against the lovers of vanity will I uncover my spear", Tsarfati employs the end-sound *q* repeatedly, emphasizing the thrust of the *sword* or *spear* that has been *emptied* from its sheathe against *vanity/foolishness*: *uvehosheqi vereyq hanit ʻariq*. In the next line, as in many lines in the poem, Tsarfati uses near homonyms to create a pleasurable repetition and also to connect the two words together. Line 19 states: "He who is reverent and delights in my excellence will stand." This phrase employs *tahmod*: (Eng. to covet, desire, or delight in), and the near homonym *taʻamod* (Eng. "it/he/she will stand"). This usage strengthens the connection between the two words and reinforces the concept that those who delight will stand. Again in line 20 Tsarfati plays with similar sounds to create an effect: I have power to bring wrath against the enemy; and I have a remedy for every pain." In Hebrew this is *li ʻoz letsorer tsar lechol tsir li tsori.* The repetition of the *tser* phoneme ties together the words "bring wrath" (Heb. *letsorer*), with the enemy, or the one that the wrath is brought against (Heb. *tsar*). The final two words cleverly reverse the thrust of the first two, explaining that God has a relief or balm (Heb. *tsori*) for every pain or deep anguish (Heb. *tsir*). Thus the tie between the four words indicates that both actions are connected. The same God who metes out justice to the wicked is also prepared to give comfort to the needy, and at times

with precisely the same action. The actions are two different sides of the same coin. By manipulating the phonemes in this way, Tsarfati is able to connect similar words together, notwithstanding the space that separates them.

Tsarfati's poetry is full of biblical allusion, as would be expected from one seeking to communicate with his traditional Jewish audience. The most important allusion weaves its way throughout the poem, as Tsarfati consistently portrays the Torah as speaking in the same way that Wisdom speaks in Proverbs, particularly in Proverbs 8. In this chapter Wisdom speaks in the first person feminine voice, just as Tsarfati's Torah does. Like in the link mentioned immediately above between the four *tser* phonemes, Wisdom both warns of destruction to those who ignore her, and promises rewards to those who seek her. Throughout the Book of Proverbs, wisdom is alternately stern in chastisement and also holds out the most tender reminders of mercy. Proverbs 8:32-36 readily demonstrates the similarity with Tsarfati's poem: "Now then, my children, listen to me; blessed are those who keep my ways. Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it. Blessed are those who listen to me, watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway. For those who find me find life and receive favor from the LORD. But those who fail to find me harm themselves; all who hate me love death."[364] Compare these verses to Tsarfati's Torah, which in lines 16-20 alternatively warns and holds out hope: "(16) There is peace in my tabernacle; with the just I deal justly, and the wicked I condemn. (17) He who despises my delights I will rend in pieces. As a lion upon a goat,

[364] All English translations of biblical texts in this study are from the New International Version. *New International Version of the Bible*, (Asheville: Abingdon Press, 1994).

so will I tear his soul… (19)He who is reverent and delights in my excellence will stand; he who makes wreckage of my statutes will be lost." Proverbs 8 provides other ties between Wisdom and Tsarfati's Torah. Both raise their voices to spread their message to all who will hear. Proverbs 8:1 states: "Does not wisdom call out? Does not understanding raise her voice?" In Tsarfati's introductory poem, he states that "Torah did raise her own song (35)." In Proverbs 8:22-24, Wisdom states that she existed before the world was created: "The LORD brought me forth as the first of his works, before his deeds of old; I was formed long ages ago, at the very beginning, when the world came to be." In Tsarfati's poem, the Torah makes the same claim: "His own secret he lay in my bosom ere the sky first revolved and the earth descended (6)." In a direct quotation from Proverbs 8:30, both mention their early days in the bosom of God, "As the days passed I gained strength, within His bosom secreted, laughing and entertained (5)." The New International Version translates this exact same Hebrew passage in the following way: "Then I was constantly at his side. I was filled with delight day after day." Tsarfati was not the first to make the connection between the Torah and Wisdom. As Ann Brener has pointed out, the early rabbinic *midrash* on Proverbs states simply: "Wisdom – this is the Torah."[365] For the best educated in Tsarfati's audience, this connection purposefully created in his poem would have imbued Tsarfati and the words of his poem with an even greater air of erudition and skill. Not only does Tsarfati's poem remind of this solitary chapter in Proverbs, but of the entire theme of wisdom and foolishness that runs through

[365] Midrash Mishlei 9:1, 10.

the entire book of Proverbs. The book is marked by a dichotomy between those who take the effort to heed good counsel and those who ignore the good counsel. For Tsarfati, the good counsel is found in the Hebrew scriptures, and the evidence of those who hearken and ignore it will become plain by witnessing who is willing to purchase the *Biblia Rabbinica* and who is not.

Many other allusions and quotes exist in the poem. Line 3 refers to the Torah as a "fountain of life" created by God, connecting it to Psalms 36:10, which refers to the love and righteousness of the Lord as a fountain of life, and as a river of delights and an abundant feast that is available to all those who seek after the Lord. In one small allusion Tsarfati thus neatly tied together the images of feasting and drinking that he presented in the introductory poem quoted above – "sweeter than honey and abundant nectar… to serve as a great feast… a double portion for their meal" (7-9, introductory poem) with the image from the later poem. Tsarfati's allusion presents the Torah as the essence of the love and righteousness of the Lord to his Jewish community. The Christians spoke much of love, but the Jews had a palpable evidence of God's love that could be held in their hands, tying them together as a community over time and space.

Line 6, which refers to the creation of the Torah "ere the sky" first revolved and the earth was created, connects to Isaiah 40:21-22, in which the Lord declares that He has proclaimed the truth "from the beginning" and "since the earth was founded," and then states that God is the same one that created the heavens (Heb. *hadoq shamayim*.) Compare this Hebrew word for heavens to the unique word for heavens used by Tsarfati

in line 6 – *doq*, which connects with his mention of the earth in this same line just as the creation of the earth is also mentioned in Isaiah 40:22). Although this passage in Isaiah does not explicitly refer to the Torah, the connection is made clear by Tsarfati. How possibly could the Lord have declared all things from the beginning? He did so through the creation of the Torah, which was also created from the beginning. Only through a permanent voice such as that written in the Torah could the Lord consistently proclaim His word from the beginning, so that mankind would be left without excuse.

Line 24 seems to use similar reasoning. Tsarfati's description of the Torah as one able to make sins white, though they be as red as jewels, connects with the well-known passage in Isaiah 1:18-20, in which Isaiah quotes the Lord. "Come now, let us settle the matter, says the Lord. Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient, you will eat the good things of the land; but if you resist and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword.' For the mouth of the Lord has spoken." In this passage, there is again a direct call to come and communicate with the Lord. There is again the warning of punishment for those who choose not to come, and the promise of great reward for those who hearken. Those who come will be blessed with a feast, but those who turn aside will be destroyed. How will the Lord discuss the issue with those who come? According to Tsarfati's allusion, the Torah, printed by the famous Bomberg, is the way in which the Lord will accomplish this feat.

Line 25 includes a clever biblical allusion in its reference to "one of noble/generous heart" (Heb. *nediv lev*). This same reference exists in two other places in the Bible, in Exodus 35:22 and 2 Chronicles 29:31. In Exodus 35 the phrase refers to the men and women who generously and willingly brought of their own possessions, such as their bracelets, earrings, rings, jewels of gold, and so forth, to make an offering of gold to the Lord. They made this offering so that the tabernacle could be erected. 2 Chronicles refers to the time of King Hezekiah, when the temple had already been built, and it had been newly cleansed and re-dedicated. This tabernacle/temple in Israel – referred to in Exodus 35 and 2 Chronicles 29 – was built so that the presence of the Lord could be symbolically manifest in the community. At the center of the tabernacle, the ark or mercy seat was placed, and within the ark was stored the broken tablets of the Torah that God had given to Moses on Sinai. Thus at the center of the offering of the people was the enthroning of the law of God in its proper place as a constant symbol of God's presence. Or, in the case of 2 Chronicles 29, the offering was focused on the gratitude of the people that the temple which had already been built had been made more efficacious, more usable, or more available to the people. In Tsarfati's day the Torah had almost universally attained this level of respect in the traditional Jewish community, symbolically representing the presence of God in the community as the temple/tabernacle had done before its destruction, and being stored in a symbolic "ark" at the most holy space in each synagogue.[366] Thus, if Bomberg was making the Torah more accessible to each Jew, then

[366] Chilton, *Classical Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism: Comparing Theologies*, 61-63.

he was in a sense allowing for a greater presence of divine power in the community. However, this would only be possible if those of noble and willing heart were to bring their "offerings of gold" to purchase the Torah so that it might exist in the community. With this phrase Tsarfati cleverly motivated his community to act according to his wishes by using the scriptural language to encourage them to new behaviors.

One final example of biblical allusion, among others that exist,[367] demonstrates Tsarfati's ability to employ imagery that had been used for a very different purpose in the original text, in order to create a new meaning in his poem. Line 33 refers to the letters and markings of the Torah found in Bomberg's printing, mentioning that none of them were rebellious or a law-breaker (Heb. *'ein mordah vahem ve'ein posh'at*). Tsarfati, of course, is cleverly saying that the letters and their markings are all perfectly placed, with none of them out of line in any way. This usage of words in an irregular way would have immediately cued the audience of the poem that Tsarfati was making an allusion to another text. In this case the text to which he referred was Ezekiel 20:38, which discusses that God will bring Israel out of the land of the rebels and the law-breakers (Heb. *haposh'im hamordim*). He goes on to say that he will bring the Israelites back to the country from which they proceeded, or back to Israel, and that the wicked will not be able to enter there. These two contexts, of course, are very different. However, connecting the two messages, Tsarfati may have intended his audience to understand that the Torah was

[367] See for example, the allusion to the Golden Calf in line 15. Compare with Exodus 32:3-5. See also the allusion in line 26 to the mark of a slave in Exodus 21:6 , describing the way in which a slave was voluntarily and permanently indentured to his master to serve him forever, in the same way that Bomberg's skillful yet benevolent talents endeared him and connected him to many who followed his work.

the way in which God could spiritually or mentally bring the Jews out of the influence of rebels and law-breakers, and protect them within the "borders" of its pages. Indeed, no rebel or law-breaker letter or marking was even suffered to exist in the Torah created by Bomberg, perhaps, as the Lord states in the same biblical verse, as an evidence of the Lord's existence and love for the His people: "Then you will know that I am the Lord." Bomberg's bible became a symbol of the perfection of the Lord and of the safety that existed in His protection. Considering the consistently precarious situation of the Jews throughout all the world at the time of the printing of the *Biblia Rabbinica*, this promise would have spoken loudly to Tsarfati's audience. Additionally, this allusion may seem even more pointed in light of another of Tsarfati's poems that will be discussed below, warning the Jews of the rebellious community in the midst of whom the Jews dwelled.

Poetry Focused on the Dominant Culture

In his station closely connected to the Christian hierarchy in Rome, serving as a trusted physician to Pope Clement VII – as evidenced by the pope's stay in Tsarfati's home during an entire summer – Tsarfati was in a unique position to view the hierarchy's treatment of and attitudes toward the Jewish community. Although historians have seen Clement's leadership as predominantly benevolent to the Jews, there still existed ample evidence that the Christian feelings toward the Jews were a simmering pot constantly threatening to boil and overrun its limits. A relatively positive situation in one time period was not a predictor of what would happen under subsequent leadership, or even under the same leadership in different situations. As has already been noted, Tsarfati

witnessed severe persecutions of the Jews in his own childhood. Indeed, the course of history in the world of Tsarfati's day, in particular the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, gave ample evidence that the Christian hierarchy could not and should not be trusted. Tsarfati was in a unique position to communicate these concerns to his people, but also needed to do so in guarded fashion, in order to maintain his place and influence among his Christian friends. This place enabled him to protect his Jewish community, and also allowed him the prestige and protection that he desired. However, because of his honored position, Tsarfati was in a situation in which the gaze of the dominant culture could watch him even more closely than others in his community.

The following poem indicates Tsarfati's negative attitude towards the Christian community, and provides a surprisingly strong voice of direction to the Jewish community. There is no way to know when it was written, and it has not been analyzed by any modern scholars. There is also no evidence that it was ever printed and published, or that it was ever meant to be published openly. It is deeply critical of the Christian hierarchy, and must have been written without the intention that any of Tsarfati's Christian audience would ever read it. It provides a key to understanding Tsarfati's attitudes toward the society in which he lived that will unlock some of the guarded descriptions that he provides in his poetic introduction to his translation of *Celestina*.

The poem contains only five lines of two hemistiches each. In true Arabic form, the end rhyme of each line – *qi* – is the same. Each hemistich contains eleven syllables, and the pattern in each hemistich unfailingly places a short vowel at the third and seventh

syllables. As in other poems, Tsarfati plays with phonemes to connect words and concept throughout.

שיר אל גולת ספרד אל רומי ירד

1	השתעשעו ושעו כצור חזקו	בית יעקב הקב והנקי
2	געלו בעם נזעם בליעל	ובכל-גליל רומי ואיטלקי
3	טרם בחטאם תספו טרם	ארצם תגרשכם וחוץ תקיא
4	טרם חרון אף רם ומתנשא	משפיל שאול לראות ומעמיקי
5	התנערו עורו פנו לכם	קומו צאו מתוך עמלקי[368]

Poem to the exiles of Spain who descended to Rome

1 Look in dismay, and consider; as a rock be strong
O house of Jacob, the small yet excellent.

2 Loathe the people of anger and decadence
In every region of Rome and Italy.

3 Ere in their sin you are destroyed; ere
You are expelled and vomited from their land;

4 Ere their fierce and high wrath
Becomes as deep as She'ol.

5 Shake yourself and wake up! Turn yourselves away.

[368] In this line, Schirmann does not follow the manuscript, which clearly reads as rendered here. Schirmann gives instead סרו רדו מתוך עמלקי. The translation into English of Schirmann's rendering ("Turn aside! Go down from the midst of Amaleki!") does not substantially differ from the translation provided here from the text of the manuscript. Schirmann, *mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 233.

Arise! Go forth from the midst of Amaleki![369]

In this poem, Tsarfati speaks very bluntly about the need for the Jews to flee from Rome, even openly referring to Rome and Italy by name. These open references are strengthened by biblical allusions, words, and phrases that would have been familiar to his audience, but Tsarfati is clear about his disdain for and distrust of the dominant culture. It is unclear with whom Tsarfati shared this poem, but it would have been intended only for his Jewish compatriots, as its spread to a wider audience would have been devastating for Tsarfati's relationship with the dominant society. Tsarfati therefore relied on its "coding" in the language of Hebrew to prevent his Christian audience from hearing the message.

I see at least two possible interpretations of the message. The first would indicate a need for all Jews to depart from Rome, much like Judah Halevi's call from al-Andalus in the twelfth century.[370] In favor of this interpretation is what seems to be Tsarfati's general criticism of the Christian community in line 2, and his direction to "loathe the people of anger and decadence in every region of Rome and Italy," followed by his direction to depart before the surging wrath of that society swallowed up the Jews and cast them down to death. It seems somewhat difficult to believe that Tsarfati would intend this warning for only a portion of the Jews, when the entire community would be in danger. Additionally, Tsarfati seems to be speaking to all Jews when he directs his

[369]Translation mine. Poem is number 205 from Tsarfati's *diwan.* It is also located in Schirmann, *mivhar hashirah ha'ivrit be'italyah*, 233.
[370] Efros and Histadruth Ivrith of America., *Judah Halevi as Poet and Thinker*, 184-90.

comments to the house of Jacob, and makes reference to the Jews' unique situation as a small, dispersed people that has maintained its identity of "excellence."

The second interpretation sees the title not as a general injunction to all Jews afflicted by Christian society, but as focused specifically on the Jews who had come to Rome from Spain. This interpretation includes an awareness of the challenge and pressure that the large groups of incoming Jews created for the Jewish community already in existence. This community had managed to survive intact for centuries, notwithstanding being surrounded by a hostile dominant culture, in part because that culture viewed the Jews as being within its control. With additional Jews begging admittance to the cities, clogging the streets, taking jobs, and stressing the community infrastructures, many Jewish leaders in Italy worked actively to prevent their acceptance. In this light, Tsarfati may have been encouraging the Spanish Jews to move on before their presence caused the ire of the Christians to peak and overflow. An additional evidence for this argument is that Tsarfati himself never did depart from Rome, although his premature death in 1527 makes it impossible to know what his actions would have been.

Between these two possibilities, the first is more likely. Tsarfati's strong condemnation of the Christian society in Italy cannot have been intended to only apply to the Spanish Jews. If he was urging Jews to flee from that unclean society, then it would not make sense for him to only apply that warning to a certain segment of the community. Additionally, it is difficult to understand how his encouragement to

"strengthen the house of Jacob, the crippled yet clean," could have been directed to the immigrants who were themselves in the most dire of difficulties.

Whichever interpretation is accurate, the biblical allusions in this short poem are frequent and add depth to the poem's meaning. The injunction in line 1 to look in dismay and consider (Heb. *hishta'sh'eu vasho'u*) could also be translated as an injunction for the Jews to cover their eyes and look away from tragedy. It is an allusion to Isaiah 29:9. Isaiah 29 expresses dismay at the pending destruction of the Jews, who did not heed the warnings of God or hearken to His counsels. As a result, Israel will be encircled by its enemies and brought down to the dust, a similar image to that provided by Tsarfati in line 4, which indicates that if the Jews are not careful, they will be brought down to *She'ol* by their enemies arrayed against them. In line 1, Tsarfati urges the Jews to consider the fierce rock of the Christian society upon whose anger they will break themselves if they do not give heed.

In line 2, Tsarfati enjoins the Jews to loathe or despise the decadence of the Christian community. The verb *ga'lu* is only found in one location in the Hebrew bible, or indeed in any of the Jewish religious texts. In Ezekiel 16:45, the Lord criticizes those Israelites who allow themselves to be surrounded by and to fall in love with non-Israelite influences on all sides. When they should have loathed those connections, they instead loathed their proper husband and the children of their covenant. Because they did not loathe the false religions of the Amorites, Hittites, and Samarians which surrounded them, in the end they were "corrupted more than they in all [their] ways" (Ezekiel 16:47).

This encouragement by Tsarfati could point to the final plight of the Jews in Spain who were not willing to leave and ended up converting to Christianity. Because the *conversos* did not flee, they ended up "hating" their own religion to the point of rejecting it and clinging to Christianity. They loathed the wrong group, just as is expressed in Ezekiel 16. Tsarfati may be indicating that Italian Jews could end up in the same predicament.

The description of the Christians as a people of decadence (Heb. *beliya'al*) also alludes to similar biblical phrases. One of these is Deuteronomy 13:14, in which some of the Israelites are called "children of Beliel" (Heb. *'anashim beney-beliya'al*). These men obtain this name because they go searching after other gods. As a result, these children of Beliel are required to be killed by the Lord. This is a slightly altered warning from that of Tsarfati in which the Christians and not the Israelites have received the title of Beliel. However, the end result is the same. Those who remain under the influence of foreign gods will ultimately meet their untimely deaths.

Line 3 contains a warning to the Jews that they will be consumed or destroyed (Heb. *tisfu*). There are four locations containing this verb in the Hebrew bible, each of them conveying a warning to the Jews of destruction if they do not avoid the corrupting sins of the people that surrounds them. Numbers 16:23-26 is an instructive example: "Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Say to the assembly, 'Move away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram.'… [Moses] warned the assembly, 'Move back from the tents of these wicked men! Do not touch anything belonging to them, or you will be swept away because of all their sins.' So they moved away from the tents of Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Dathan and Abiram had come out and were standing with their wives, children and little ones at the entrances to their tents." As it turned out in this story, the

Lord proved that these men were guilty of idolatry and in the end they suffered death for their betrayal. Interestingly, they died because the earth opened up and swallowed them into its depths, similar to Tsarfati's warning in line that the unresponsive, recalcitrant Jews would be brought down to She'ol by the Christians if they remained in Italy.

Tsarfati's warning that the land would expel (Heb. *tegareshchem*) the Jews or "vomit [them] out" (Heb. *taqi'*) if they did not depart willingly has multiple ties in biblical texts, each of them indicating a direct response by the earth because of the lack of righteousness of the Israelites upon it, almost like the response which Tsarfati warned of in which the Jews would be brought low to see She'ol. In Leviticus 18:28, the Israelites are told that if they defile the land, they will be vomited out, and in Leviticus 20:22 they are enjoined to observe all of the statutes of the Lord so that the land doesn't vomit them out. In Tsarfati's poem, the land is defiled by the Christians, but it is still this defiled land that will vomit out the Jews, who remained too long upon it. Tsarfati's warning that the Jews would be expelled by the Christians hearkens to the story of the exodus from Egypt in Exodus 11:1, in which Pharaoh, the prototypical enemy of the Jews, expelled the Jews from the unclean land of Egypt.

The allusion to the fierce anger of the Christians in line 4 is a direct allusion to the same phrase (Heb. *haron 'af*) in Numbers 25:3. This story is important because its connection between idolatry and illicit love demonstrates well the biblical connection between these two themes with which Tsarfati and the Jews would have been very familiar:

> While Israel was staying in Shittim, the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods. The people ate the sacrificial meal and bowed down before these gods. So Israel

> yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor. And the Lord's anger burned against them (Numbers 25:1-3).

As can be seen, while ancient religions at times encouraged illicit sexual relations, the idea of these religions also represents the faithlessness of the Israelites to the Lord as they go "a-whoring" after other gods. This seduction of the Israelites by the foreign gods leads in verse four to the Lord's direction to kill the offenders, so that the fierce anger (*haron 'af*) of the Lord might be turned away.

A final biblical allusion can be found in line 5, in which the Jews are with finality and clarity warned to leave, to turn aside, to go out from among the Amalekites (Heb. *penu lechem… mitoch 'amaliqi*). Each time that the phrase *penu lechem* is found in the Bible, it has the direct implication of moving away from an incorrect or dangerous way towards a destiny. For example, in Numbers 14:25 the Israelites who have left Egypt are encouraged by the Lord to turn away from their course (*penu lachem*) that will take them through the land of the Amalekites and the Canaanites. They are instead to go towards the Red Sea, in the direction that the Lord commands. The Amalekites would become perhaps the group that was most associated as the everlasting enemy of the Jews, with which the Jews were forever at physical and ideological war because of the Amalekites' mistreatment of the Israelites in the wilderness and their worship of false gods.[371] Perhaps no other title could better apply to Tsarfati's appellation for the Christians, who had been the dominant force in Italy for centuries, at times severely misusing the Jews, and constantly enticing them away after the worship of foreign gods.

[371] "Amalekites," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik (New York: Thomson Gale, 2007), 3:343.

Tsarfati's longing for the Jews to be freed from the dangerous situation in which they found themselves, and his anger against the oppression of the dominant society, seems to have found expression in his support for the messianic claimant David Hareuveni. In a poem that was likely written at the time of Hareuveni's visit, Tsarfati gave voice to his feelings:

1) גילו בני גולה הכי פקד/צורכם ברוב חסדו שאריתכם

2) כי מסבטיון יצאו שבטי/יה לעלות ציון בחברתכם

3) וילבשו חימה וסות נקם/כי קצרה נפשם בצרתכם.[372]

1) Rejoice exceedingly O people of exile. He has visited the need of your remainder in the abundance of his mercy.

2) For from Sambation went forth the tribes of the Lord to go up to Zion in your company.

3) They will put on garments of anger and vengeance, for they are greatly troubled by your woes.

This poem, written with end-rhyme *–chem*, reveals the extent to which Tsarfati desired a change in the situation of his people, and that he longed for anger and vengeance to come upon those who had kept the Jewish people in subjection. Although Tsarfati acted as a go-between with the Christian society, receiving benefits for himself and for his people, he appears to have known that the dominant culture held no special love for him. He rejoices in the emergence of Hareuveni, a representative of the tribes of Israel – meaning

[372] This is Poem 15 from Tsarfati's *diwan*. It has been published in Dan Almagor, "shirey ge'ulah: gilu, beney golah," *Hado'ar*, October 7,1994, 18-20.

the lost ten tribes – which would emerge from the river Sambation, the location of Hareuveni's proclaimed kingdom. The strength of these tribes would allow Tsarfati's people to return to the land of Zion. Most strikingly, Tsarfati proclaims that the armies of the deliverer would dress in garments of anger and vengeance. This pointed language, written in the coded language of Hebrew, sheds light on a correct understanding of all of Tsarfati's poems. Underneath his skilled verse, his talented use of Latin and of Hebrew, and his adoption of Italian literary forms and Renaissance themes from the dominant culture, he maintained a deep longing for change that looked forward to a time when he would no longer need to entertain and submit to those who held power over his people. One variant interpretation might indicate that Tsarfati's feelings in this poem are only an evidence of how he wanted to present himself and Hareuveni to his own people at this particular time, and that Hareuveni's other poems indicate a real connection to and appreciation for Christian society and culture. With either interpretation, it is clear that Tsarfati played the role of go-between carefully and well.

A final poem to be analyzed in this chapter effectively shows that Tsarfati was very aware of the role that he played. After the manner of Proverbs 25, which teaches the reader wisdom, temperance, and caution in dealing with enemies, Tsarfati taught and warned his people of how they must act to successfully survive in a society where they were labeled as the "other:"

1) במעלות זר שמור אל תעלה פן / זמן ישפילך אם ימצאך

2) ואל תקל מאוד פן ילעגו לך / ואל תכביד ויגעו נושאך

3) והוקר רגלך מבית עמיהם/ואל ישבעך פן ישנאך.[373]

1) Be careful in the ascents of the stranger; Do not go up; if he find you, he will humble you for a time;

2) And do not abase yourself, lest they ridicule you; and do not weary them for they will be tired of carrying you.

3) Keep your feet from their gathering places. / Let them not be satiated with you for they will hate you.

Tsarfati begins by warning his people to be careful among a foreign people, especially among their "ascents" which probably refers to their churches, or to other places of power and influence such as a courthouse. In Rome there were many of these locations, particularly in the Vatican, which in many ways constituted the highest place or ascents in the entire Christian world. He gives this advice two times, in lines 1 and 3. In line 1 he labels the Christians as the "other," or the stranger, a technique in creating a subversive discourse that is typically used by the dominant culture.

Tsarfati also gives important advice with regards to how the Jews speak with the dominant culture, encouraging them on the one hand to not abase themselves or make themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the dominant society, but on the other hand to not exalt themselves either, or to weary those with power through their continuous requests. It appears that Tsarfati is encouraging the Jews to keep a difficult balance. They must associate with the Christians because they live among them, but they must be cautious to

[373] This is poem 22 from Tsarfati's *diwan*. It has been published in Dan Almagor, "'al ner, 'al gevurah, ve'al hiduq-hachagorah: 8 shirim leyosef tsarfati," *Musaf hasifrut shel yedi'ot 'achronot*, December 14, 1979, 21.

not call too much attention to themselves. They must do what is necessary to escape the gaze of the dominant culture, because that culture could become weary of them and grow to hate and despise them.

Line 3 alludes to Proverbs 25:17, in which the reader is admonished – in wording very similar to that in Tsarfati's poem, which refers to the "houses of their people" (Heb. *beyt 'ameyhem*), rendered "their gathering places" in my translation – to "Withdraw your foot from your neighbor's house; lest he be weary of you, and so hate you" (Heb. *hoqer raglecha mibeyt 'amihem pen yisba'acha usna'echa.*) Tsarfati's choice to connect his words with Proverbs 25 is purposeful and instructive in this study of the role of a go-between. As was mentioned above, most of Proverbs 25 contains instruction on how to avoid censure and disgrace in the eyes of others by taking great care with the words one speaks. The speaker should neither exalt or abase himself in the presence of others (vs. 6-7), should not publicly argue with others (vs. 8), and should not tell his secrets in public (vs. 9-10, crucial advice for Tsarfati and his people in Rome, as well as for Judaizing *conversos* in Spain). In a sentence which aptly describes the vital role of language for a go-between figure, vs. 11 states, "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver." This phrase could have served as Tsarfati's mantra in all of his communications with both his Jewish culture, and with the powerful Christian culture of Rome.

CONCLUSION TO CHAPTER 4

This chapter has undertaken a general analysis of Tsarfati's poetry – excluding his introduction to *Celestina*, which will be analyzed in the next chapter – including a close reading of a number of Tsarfati's poems. Like many influential Jews before and after him who became leaders of the Jewish community, Tsarfati walked a very challenging line. In order to succeed in life, Tsarfati clearly felt a need to adopt many of the attitudes and literary styles of the dominant culture within which he lived. He needed to be able to respectfully interact with this culture and to excel in the culture's skills. Additionally, Tsarfati worked to expose his own traditional community to the intellectual and literary trends that were popular in his day. He introduced these trends – particularly the *ottava rima* – into Hebrew literature, and strengthened the influence of other Jews such as Immanuel Haromi who had preceded him. Tsarfati's poetry shows concern for the themes of his day such as fascination with romantic love, a love of language, a comfort level with bawdy love poetry, an appreciation for Arabic poetic forms, and a strong attraction to the miracle of printing. He expresses all of these secular, "non-Jewish" values clearly in his poetry.

Not only did Tsarfati need to talk the talk of the dominant society and act as a go-between for Christian society among the Jews in order to help them cope and hopefully excel in their place, he also needed to communicate in traditional Jewish forms of literature so that he would be accepted by his own society, and to represent the Jews faithfully while in Christian society. Thus Tsarfati elaborated on religious themes in his

poetry, made extensive use of biblical allusion to add richness and depth to his messages, and acted as a true spiritual leader in warning the Jews of moral and physical dangers. This role was problematic for Tsarfati since he felt the need to strongly condemn and warn his people of the very society that he was trying to please and that granted him his sustenance as a doctor and litterateur. To our knowledge today, these warnings were always made in Hebrew, a "coded" language without great accessibility to most Christians, and were included in poems that would never be published. In this way, Tsarfati sought to avoid the gaze of the dominant culture and created a subversive discourse that labeled the Christian hierarchy in much the same way that the hierarchy had labeled the Jews.

According to extant records and to the evidence of his Hebrew poetry, Tsarfati was extremely able in both roles, that of the traditional Jew and that of the Jew who appreciated and adopted "Christian" forms. He received ample praise from both communities, and seemed to succeed in both venues. However, the final tragedy of his life reveals a bitter irony of his efforts. In the end, the dominant hierarchy that Tsarfati had worked to emulate and to please in many aspects of his life still regarded him as the "other." While the Christian hierarchy successfully survived the depredations of the sack of Rome in 1527, Tsarfati was not similarly protected. In addition, possibly because he lived in an area that was accessible to the pope and not in the immediate vicinity of the Jewish community, Tsarfati did not end up receiving the minimal protection that his own community could provide. In the end this man who had tried to span both worlds was to

die alone in a liminal state, not rescued by either. Tsarfati did not take the advice that he himself had given in secret to his own community: to depart from among the Christians before their anger overflowed and destruction came upon the Jews. Instead, he stayed among the Christians even more fully than did most of his Jewish compatriots – although never abandoning his religious principles to do so – and at the end was in the wrong place when the predicted trials came to Rome. In the end it was Tsarfati himself that saw and entered into She'ol.

Chapter 5 – Tsarfati's Hebrew Introduction to *La Celestina*

INTRODUCTION

As was seen in the preceding chapter, one of the ways in which Joseph ben Samuel Tsarfati was a man of his time was in his affinity for opening new works with an introductory poem. He wrote poems introducing the *Biblia Rabbinica* of 1525, another poem introducing a *mahzor* (or prayer-book) also published by Bomberg in 1513 but not extant, another poem introducing Calonymos ben Calonymos's popular *Masseket Purim*, two poems introducing Eliah Levita's grammar in 1518, and another introducing Maimonides's *Moreh Nevokhim.*[374] However, one of the introductory poems that Tsarfati wrote was unique in that it introduced a work, or at least a translation or adaptation of a work, that was composed by Tsarfati himself. This piece was the introduction to Tsarfati's translation of *Celestina*.

In the poem, Tsarfati provides the date of 438 for the completion of the poem. This is not an understandable date when working with the standard Hebrew convention for dating, which was used by Tsarfati in the poem, analyzed above, introducing the *Biblia Rabbinica.* Conventional dating would provide the year 1678, over one hundred and fifty years after Tsarfati's death. However, there was a less common convention for dating in which the reference point was not the creation of the world, but rather the destruction of the Temple in 69 or 70 C.E. Using this date (in other words adding 69 to the number 438) provides the number 507. To this number should be added 1,000, and

[374] See Cassuto, "Some Poems of Joseph Sarfati," 58-63; Almagor, "shirim 'al sefarim leyosef ben shmuel tsarfati," 21-36.

we obtain the date of 1507. This date is only one year after the translation of *Celestina* into Italian. Since none of Tsarfati's contemporaries ever mention his ability to speak or write in Spanish, it is most likely that Tsarfati used the Italian version for his translation. Additionally, the translator of the Italian version, Alfonso Ordóñez, served in the court of Pope Julio II, as did Tsarfati.[375] It is very likely that Tsarfati obtained and had the opportunity to read Rojas's work through this mutual friendship.

There is no evidence that Tsarfati ever actually translated *Celestina*. There are no extant copies of this translation and there was no contemporaneous mention of it by anyone besides Tsarfati himself. The only source that indicates that there ever was a translation is the poem itself. However, as will be seen, Tsarfati speaks in the poem of the translation as a project already completed, which was the practice of the time. The introductory poem would have been one of the last things crafted by the artist, who usually wrote the introduction for another author after first reviewing the work to be able to represent it appropriately. In this study, I will speak of the translation as if it actually did exist, although the question will remain unanswered unless the manuscript is unearthed at some future date.

It is certainly with a great sense of longing that the modern scholar contemplates the existence of such a work. Particularly in light of the twentieth-century revelation of Rojas's *converso* background, the manner in which a (possibly Sephardic) Jew from Italy approached Rojas's work would have yielded countless valuable insights. Assuming that

[375] McPheeters, "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI," 401.

the translation was made, this work became the first Hebrew play (although see chapter one for a qualification of that title) ever written, predating Judah Somme's play by almost fifty years. This would also make it the first Hebrew "comedy" in the dramatic sense of the word, although Rojas was later to make the mentioned switch to "tragi-comedy" in order to please even more of his devoted readers.

However, notwithstanding this loss, the existence and themes of Tsarfati's introductory poem can themselves provide some clues regarding Tsarfati's interest and approach. This chapter, then, will tie together the analysis developed in the preceding chapters, answering in part the question of what may have drawn Tsarfati to translate *Celestina*. This seems to have been the only translation which Tsarfati ever attempted. Why did he choose *Celestina*? In a personal email discussion with one scholar, this question was dismissed readily. This scholar stated, "We can clearly understand why [Tsarfati] was attracted to the Celestina, which was such a huge success and was reprinted again and again… Were there any other popular, intriguing plays written by Jewish playwrights he could choose?"[376]

However, while both Tsarfati and Rojas had Jewish backgrounds, many differences existed between them in their historical circumstances and their subsequent choices. In opposition to the foregoing statement indicating almost an inevitability to Tsarfati's translation, I instead posit that Tsarfati's efforts were purposeful and not

[376] Personal email communication, July 5, 2010. This statement is somewhat anachronistic, coming from a modern viewpoint and understanding. There is no evidence that Rojas's Jewish background was known in Tsarfati's day. In this study, rather than make the claim that Tsarfati was attracted to *Celestina* because Rojas was a *converso*, I have instead worked to show that Tsarfati was drawn to Rojas's work because of the themes that it represented, which were themes that supported Tsarfati's own outlook and worldview.

casually made or readily dismissed. Indeed I have made and will continue to make the claim in this chapter that Tsarfati was drawn to Rojas's work in part because – although both chose to respond to divergent situations in different ways – both felt the pressure of acting as a go-between for the two cultures of Christianity and Judaism. Both authors had to act under the gaze of a dominant society that was at least to a certain degree hostile to them, and learned to speak in a way that their traditional Jewish community could understand them, but that was difficult or impossible for the dominant Christian hierarchy to unravel. In other words, both perfected the ability of operating and speaking a subversive discourse safely in public, sending in this public discourse messages and ideas that were cleverly hidden. Both authors also had a love for the art of language. While Rojas seems to have been deeply cynical in the area of religion, Tsarfati was not. However, Tsarfati's works do show that he was cynical with regards to Christian promises of safety and friendship. Both used the allure of "love" to represent the dangerous, false promises that Christianity offered the Jews.

Additionally, I posit that Tsarfati was drawn to Rojas's work because both men partook of the changing literary climate of their time, using forms that were available to them, whether new or old, and communicating in an atmosphere charged with enthusiasm for change. For Rojas, since Spain was somewhat behind Italy in many of the literary innovations of the day, this meant that he used mostly medieval forms of communication, but that he spoke in a way that unwittingly clothed those medieval patterns in the concerns of the Renaissance. Tsarfati, on the other hand, used newly developed forms of

poetry, but often utilized them to develop traditional, Jewish themes. This second supporting claim is not very revolutionary. It could be said of almost any author that he lived in the middle of a time of change, and that he acted as a go-between the two periods. However, this claim provides a framework that allows me to analyze both of these men and their works to see how they were similar to or deviated from other works and authors in their time, and in what themes they were drawn together by similar interests.

Tsarfati's introductory poem reveals some of the connections that have already been mentioned above. First, the love of the intrinsic power of language is evident in Tsarfati's work. Second, Tsarfati, like Rojas, spoke in coded language that allowed him to communicate messages to his co-religionists that would not have been acceptable to the dominant gaze. Although Tsarfati was willing to compose Hebrew poems that strongly criticized Christian society in Rome when there was an assurance that the poem would not reach their hands, the situation with his translation of *Celestina* would have been different. It is likely that Tsarfati fully intended his translation to be published and accessible to all, both to his primary Jewish audience, but also potentially to a secondary Christian audience of which a small number might attempt to read his work. The existence of this introductory poem supports the idea that the work was intended for publication. Thus, Tsarfati had to act with extreme caution in the way he presented his themes. Finally, like Rojas and in connection with the culture of his time, Tsarfati's poetry shows a fascination with the concept of love. I will make the claim that, like

Rojas, Tsarfati used love as a coded message for the allure of the false promises of Christianity. Each of the themes mentioned above will become evident in the following analysis of Tsarfati's poem.

THE POEM[377]

שיר חברו המשורר על העתקת חבור למליביה וקליסטו

1 פנו דודים למלחמת ידידים,	אשר המה בפח חשק לכודים,
2 ומעניהם בהוכח שניהם	בטוב מלים ובמשלים חמודים,
3 ועז חמות ואימות העלמות,	מריבתם ואהבתם[378] צמדים,
4 וממתקים אשר בשפת חשוקים	בדברם אל-בנות החן נגידים,
5 כלי נשקם בהאבקם בחשקם,	ומהתלות ותחבולות עבדים,
6 ונכליהם כלי חמס כליהם,	לשום שבר בלב גבר ופידים,
7 וקשרם על-כבוד בעל לגנבו,	ומורדים בו בכל-עתות מרדים;
8 ושם ערמות ומרמות הזקנות,	ואיך פורשות בכל-חוצות מצודים,

[377] With regards to Cassuto's rendering of this text he stated, "I made some changes in the case of deficiencies and excesses, or in exchanging a final *mem* for a final *nun* in pronouns attached to nouns and to verbs, that I saw as unnecessary to the meaning. I added vocalization and punctuation signs according to the meaning. Whenever I deemed it appropriate to make additions in order to clarify the meaning of the poet, I indicated it in the notes, as I did wiith my notes on biblical passages and on the writings of the sages that the poet indicates or that are drawn from them and their sayings and expressions." See Cassuto, "mishirey yosef ben shemuel tsarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit", 123. Translation mine. Almagor mentioned these changes in his rendering of the poem, indicating his position that some of the changes were unnecessary. See Almagor, "hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," 24. In this version of the poem, I mostly follow Cassuto's rendering of the manuscript, but have changed final *nun*s back to final *mems*.

[378] Here I have followed the manuscript, rather than Cassuto's and Almagor's renderings, which changed מריבתם ואהבתם to מרבתן ואהבתן.

9 ושם שיחות תדברנה שפחות להדליק אש בלב דודים ואודים,

10 ותרוינה[379] גבירות רוש ולענה בהרבותן בקרבתן חשדים,

11 וקול אהבים במכאובים עצבים יצוריהם בציריהם פרודים;

12 בכי דמעם נהי שועם ושבעם באף זעם בנבזי עם נדודים,

13 וצוחתם ואנחתם ואיך הם בכל-רגע בכל-פגע חרדים,

14 וגם-חבלם בציר הבלם ואבלם, בתת מלים כמו דלים מרודים,

15 ושבת כל-נבוני עם ככלכל ביד אשה בלי בושה שדודים,

16מנוגפים יחפים לאלפים, ונידפים בכל-פינות ונדים.

17 אחו שיחם נדוד ארחם וטרחם בסבלם מעמס אלפי פרדים

18 והעת יכשלו יבלו ויכלו, במשואות מאוד מהם כבדים.

19 ואין בינה ואין עצה נכונה, ואין מכשיר ואין מישיר צעדים

20 לגבר גברו עליו עלמות, ושמו בחרי רגליו בסדים

21 ובמה ישענו שועים באהבים ואיפה ימצאו סמך סעדים?

22 ואין באהבה מחסה ומכסה, ואין חומל ואין גומל חסדים.

23 והיא תשבר גוית איש ותקבור, והיא תצבור בלב גיבור פחדים,

24 והיא תשפיל גבה רוח ותפיל, והיא תעביר גאון מגביר גדודים.

25 מתי השם והשכל תגרשם באף מהיות בבית עליון פקידים.

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[379] Here I have followed Cassuto's and Almagor's renderings, which changed תרוינה in the manuscript to ותרוינה.

26 ומעדנה ועד-זקנה ושיבה בעולה יעבודון לה פקודים.

27 שבחיה בכל-עת האוילים בשקר עורכים נגדה ובודים;

28 אדמה פעלה[380] העדר גשמי[381] ושמי מלאו רוחות ואדים.

29 ושוא שירות לפתות הגבירות וריק להמות כאימות על יחידים,

30 ואך כסף לבב יעלות יאסף, ותת רעים צעיפים עם רדידים,

31 והזהב ינשא דוד וירהב, ויצמיח בכל-חוח נרדים,

32 והוא נשיא והוא ישיא אנשים, והוא ינעים ישישים עם ילדים,

33 ורוב משאות ישיבון לב צבאות, ורב חרון[382] עלי גרון רבידים.

34 תנו מנות ומתנות לעפרות, וליפות חליפות כל-בגדים!

35 הכי קצפם ירף נזם באפם, ותת דודם עלי ידם צמידים.[383]

36 וכן עפרה בדוד תחשק ותשק, תרוהו כחפצהו מגדים,

37 ולא תזיד כדרכה עוד ותזיד כתאותו לשבעתו נזידים.

38 אבל מה-טוב ומה-נעים צנועים, נטות מנה וסור אל הצדדים!

39 לנכליהם וכבליהם שלמה ודוד הם שניהם לך שהדים.

40 בקרבם מלאכי מות יגורון, ושעיר עם המון שדות ושדים,[384]

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[380] Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed פעלם in the manuscript to פעלה.

[381] Although difficult to read, this is most likely גשמים in the manuscript.

[382] Here I have followed Cassuto and Almagor, who changed וטוב מרון in the manuscript to רוב מרון

[383] In this line I have provided final *–mem*s rather than final *–nun*s, following the manuscript rather than Cassuto and Almagor in the words קצפם, באפם, דודם, and ידם. However I have followed Cassuto's and Almagor's rendering when they changed ירב in the manuscript to ירף.

41 ואלה שודדים יום יום בני איש בכשפיהן וכל-חי מאבידים.

42 ברח יפין ראה דפין הכי הן כלי נידה בסות חמדה אפודים.

43 מאס צופן הכי סופן צנינים שנונים בך ותוך לבך שפודים.

44 כסילים הם אשר נענים אליהם[385] משוגעים אשר כורעים ומודים.

45 ומליביאה לכל-רעיה ודודה לנס אקים לכל-חושקים ודודים.

46 ויטו מנתיב חשק לאומי, ואישו יברחו מכל-יקודים,

47 ומלבם יכבוהו וקרבם, ושרשיו יערו עד יסודים.

48 פנה אלי והט אזן למלי, ובי תצהל עדת וקהל שרידים.

49 הטוב תהיו לבוז רעי ושועי, בחרמי יעלות יחדו אגודים,

50 באין איל וקרני אוז כאיל וכתישים ביד נשים עקודים?

51 אני יוסף בנו הרב שמואל, נשיא למיחדים דת מעמידים,

52 מקור חוכמה ומעין כל מזימה, לאהל יעקב משען יתדים,

53 וצרפתי יכנוהו הלא הוא אשר שירת גדול מושלים ורודים,

54 אדון יוליוס וכהן ראש לאמים, אשר השמים גאון רמים וזדים.

55 אמת העתיק לשוני זה להמתיק עני רשים ולב אישים טרודים,

56 ורק ענין אני מעתיק ועורך פאר שיחי לאחי היהודים.

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[384] In lines 39 and 40 I have retained the final –*mem*s from the manuscript rather than following Cassuto and Almagor in these words: לנכליהם וכבליהם and בקרבן.

[385] I have retained the final *mem* from the manuscript in the word אליהם, rather than change to the renderings of Cassuto and Almagor, which offer אליהן.

57 עדת לצים אשר נגדי חלוצים הלא יהיו במדתם מדודים,[386]

58ובערה בם ללא חינם גיהנם, אשר שם הם לתת הדין עתידים,

59 ודינוני בזאת לזאות המוני, חסידים כל-עדי חמדה ענודים;

60 וחיש יזרח עלי ראשכם מאורכם, ויזבדכם אלהים טוב זבדים,

61 בהדליק את-לבבכם יעלת-חן, ותחיון[387] תוך יקוד חילים ואידים.

62 כאחד מהרו עורו וסורו, פנו דודים למלחמת ידידים.

תם נשלם תל"ח

1 Turn, lovers, to the war of lovers,
Trapped in the snare of desire,

2 With their intentions to bandy
Beautiful words and charming fables;

3 And the powerful anger and dread of maidens,
Whose conflict and love are inseparable;

4 With dulcitudes in the mouths of lovers
When they speak artfully to beautiful women.

5 Consider also their weapons – in the struggle against their desire –
Of servants: mocking and scheming;

6 Their mischief, for their weapons are weapons of violence,

[386] I have here retained the renderings of Cassuto and Almagor, who provided הלא יהיו rather than הוי יהיו in the manuscript.
[387] I have here followed the versions of Cassuto and Almagor, who changed ותהיון in the manuscript to ותחיון.

Is to plant destruction and devastation in a man's heart.

7 Their conspiracy is to rob their master's honor,

And in every moment they rebel against him.

8 And there lie the craftiness and deception of old ladies,

And how they cast forth snares in every street.

9 There maid-servants tell tales,

That light a fire and embers in the heart of lovers;

10 They feed their mistresses with venom and bitter wormwood,

Multiplying suspicions within them.

11 The voices of lovers are in sorrowful pain,

Their limbs torn apart in their deep anguish.

12 Their tearful weeping, the lament of their imploring; they are saturated

With wrath among a despised, wandering people.

13 Their screams and their sighs, and how,

In every moment, and with every pain, they tremble.

14 As well as their injury, the anguish of their foolishness, and their sorrow,

Spouting complaints like the completely destitute.

15 How all the wise leaders of the people, like Calcol,

Sit ashamed robbed by the hand of a woman.

16 Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands,

Scattered on every corner, they wander to and fro;

17 I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails
As they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules,
18 When they stumble, wither, and perish
With burdens too heavy for them.
19 There is no wisdom, and there is no correct counsel,
And no one fit to guide, and no one to straighten the step
20 Of a man, conquered by maidens,
Who with wrath place his feet in the stocks.
21 Upon what may lovers depend?
Where will they find support or assistance?
22 There is no shelter or shade in love.
There is no one to have pity, nor any who grants favor.
23 She will break and bury the body of a man;
She will fill the heart of the valiant with fear;
24 She will humble and knock down the haughty;
She will remove the great pride from a strong man;
25 She will cast out men of renown and wisdom,
In anger, from their position in high places.
26 From the youth to the white-haired ancient,
Men who serve her are bound by her yoke.
27 The foolish constantly praise her,

And in vain they falsely pose for her.

28 I envision their deeds as absent of rain,

Although the sky is full of wind and clouds.

29 Songs to seduce maidens are in vain,

Vacuous speeches as the boastings of mothers about their children.

30 Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles,

As the gifts of veils and scarves.

31 Gold will lift up the lover in glory,

And will convert every thorn into spikenard.

32 It rules as a prince, elevating men,

And bringing much joy to the elderly and to children;

33 Great gifts will soften the heart of armies,

As necklaces will placate great wrath.

34 Give gifts and offerings to the gazelles;

And clothing and dresses to beautiful women!

35 Truly a nose ring softens their malice,

As arm bracelets given by their lovers.

36 Thus the beauty will desire her lover and will kiss him;

She will satisfy him with sweets as he desires.

37 She will not brew mischief, as before, but will cook

Pottage, to satiate his desire.

38 O chaste ones! How good and excellent it is

To turn away from her and to move aside.

39 Of their tricks and their chains, Solomon

And David both are witnesses.

40 Within them dwell the angels of death;

They swarm with demons and she-devils

41 Who daily plunder the sons of men

By their enchantments, and cause all to perish.

42 Flee from their beauty; behold their defects. For they are

Menstruous vessels robed in glorious attire.

43 Despise their nectar, for their end is thorns,

Sharp within you, with skewers that pierce your heart.

44 Only fools respond to them;

Only mad men prostrate themselves and worship.

45 And Melibea, for her friends and her lover,

I will lift up as a sign for all those that love and desire.

46 So that my people will turn from the path of desire;

Flee from its burning fire.

47 Extinguish it from your hearts;

Destroy it entirely from within them.

48 Turn to me, and pay attention to my words,

And you will rejoice in me, gathering and assembly of survivors.

49 Is it seemly for you, my friends and princes, to be shamed
In the nets of gazelles bundled together?

50 Like a ram without strength or horns of power,
Or male goats bound by the hand of women?

51 I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince
Of the faithful, pillar of the faith;

52 A source of wisdom and a wellspring of all intrigues,
The support of the stakes of Jacob's tent,

53 Whose name is Tsarfati; is it not he
Who has served great rulers and princes,

54 Such as Pope Julius, priest, head of the nations,
Who has brought low the greatness of the prideful and the wicked?

55 Truth has this tongue of mine translated, to sweeten
The affliction of the impoverished, and the heart of a burdened people,

56 My only concern is as a translator; I arrange
The beauty of my conversation for my brethren the Jews.

57 The group of mockers that strive against me,
Who will be measured according to their own measurement.

58 Not in vain will Hell burn in them,
Those who there are given to the future judgments.

59 Judge me in this, favorably, my people,

Faithful, adorned with every adornment of precious things;

60 Your glory will soon shine over you,

And God will grant you the best of gifts,

61 When a graceful gazelle lights your hearts,

While you remain in the midst of a burning conflagration.

62 All as one make haste! Awake and turn aside!

Turn, lovers, to the war of lovers.

GENERAL OUTLINE – THE POWER OF LANGUAGE AND A FOCUS ON LOVE

Like many of his other poems, Tsarfati wrote this poem in classic Spanish style, with two hemistiches per line and each line concluding with the end-rhyme "*-dim.*" There are eleven syllables per hemistich without fail throughout the 62 lines of the poem. The short syllables fall on the first, fifth, and ninth syllables in each hemistich. The first line and the last line are exactly the same, tying the poem together like bookends, facing inward, and placing emphasis on their message, indicating that the meat of that message will be found in all that is spoken in between. As in his other poems, Tsarfati skillfully employs similar phonemes in many hemistiches to play upon meanings. For example, Tsarfati organized line 20 to read as follows: *legever gavru 'alav 'alamot* (Eng. "a man, conquered by maidens"). Thus the first two words, "man" (Heb. *gever*) and "conquered" (Heb. *gavru*), are tied together, indicating perhaps that the man is inextricably tied to the position of the conquered. These two words are followed by the words, literally "upon

him" (Heb. *'alav*) and "maidens" (Heb. *'alamot*), perhaps tying together the role of maidens as the conqueror, their victory on top ensured by the similar phonemes with which they are joined (or perhaps simply a playful manipulation of sounds, without any special meaning). The first hemistich of line 14 employs a similar play of phonemes: *vegam-hevlam bestir hevlam ve'evlam* (Eng. "As well as their injury – *hevlam* – in the anguish of their foolishness – *hevlam* – and their sorrow – *'evlam*"). In this hemistich the three words injury, foolishness, and sorrow are connected with similar phonemes that produce a pleasing, rhythmical effect in the poem and show that these three words describing the lovers as interwoven, perhaps in a cause and effect relationship. Many other similar plays on sounds and words can be found throughout the poem, again demonstrating Tsarfati's agility with the Hebrew language.

The poem opens with a line encouraging the listener to pay attention to the war of lovers, which connects neatly with Rojas's opening line of his prologue to *Celestina*, which indicated that "all is conflict." Indeed, just as the reader was warned, the entire poem speaks of the conflict of love. Lines 2-10 discuss the woes of lovers who are entangled in the webs of love, and indicate that there are evil people – wily servants and plotting old women – who desire to ensnare the young and foolish by inciting their passions. These destructive characters use the power of language to tease the thoughts of the young and to lead them into illicit relationships. For example, Tsarfati warns: "Consider also the weapons… of servants: mocking and scheming; their mischief, for their weapons are weapons of violence, is to plant destruction and devastation in a man's

heart. Their conspiracy is to rob their master's honor, and in every moment they rebel against him." Although Tsarfati states that the servants' weapons are "weapons of violence," the only weapons to which he refers are weapons of the tongue that seek to influence a man's thoughts and feelings. His warning against the old crones similarly describes snares, but again these are verbal snares: "And there lie the craftiness and deception of old ladies, and how they cast forth snares in every street." Finally, his warning against the maid-servants clearly focuses on the power of language to alter moods and perceptions: "There maid-servants tell tales, that light a fire and embers in the heart of lovers; they feed their mistresses with venom and bitter wormwood, multiplying suspicions within them." These lines hearken directly to Rojas's work, in which can be found a conniving procuress, servants, and maid-servants, all of whom are seeking to profit by stoking the flames of love within the young couple.

The powerful results of these entrapments are catalogued in lines 11-21, making the lovers' plight sound pitiful to the extreme: "The voices of lovers are in sorrowful pain, their limbs torn apart in their deep anguish. Their tearful weeping, the lament of their imploring;… their screams and their sighs, and how, in every moment, and with every pain, they tremble. As well as their injury, the anguish of their foolishness, and their sorrow…" The conniving of the servants and procuresses has met its mark; their words have produced extreme agony. Love is described as having a real, overarching power to create deep misery. Although a similar description of love can be found in

Tsarfati's love poetry, this description of love's negative effects is more dark, and sinister. Rather than being a sweet agony, these results are simply agony.

Not only does this description not perfectly coincide with Tsarfati's love poetry, but it also can no longer be matched directly to the story of *Celestina*. Melibea's life does end in misery when Calisto dies at the wall, and Calisto does express his anguish until his love with Melibea is returned by her. However, the descriptions produced by Tsarfati here seem to pass well beyond the psychological effects of love found in the story. In other words, Tsarfati has a view of love and a possible didactic intent in translating *Celestina*, and in writing this poem, that are perhaps not simply to provide the Jews with Rojas's story. In fact, the only place in *Celestina* in which such a powerful diatribe against the false power of love can be found is in Pleberio's final lament, that has been analyzed in chapter two.

In 22-28, Tsarfati turns his attention to "love" in general, ignoring it as a tool in the hands of enemies, and instead personifying it as an entity with real power. This theme continues the emphasis discussed in the preceding paragraph, and again matches well with Pleberio's final lament. Tsarfati claims that: "There is no shelter or shade in love… She will break and bury the body of a man; she will fill the heart of the valiant with fear; she will humble and knock down the haughty; she will remove the great pride from a strong man; she will cast out men of renown and wisdom." Besides the clear allusion to Pleberio's lament, there are numerous biblical allusions made by this portion of Tsarfati's presentation that will be mentioned below, along with their significance.

Lines 29-37 shift the theme again, and teach the audience how to assuage the power of love and how to obtain the favor of maidens, so that rather than damaging the lover, they will instead favor him. Tsarfati teaches the audience that: "Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles, as the gifts of veils and scarves. Gold will lift up the lover in glory, and will convert every thorn into spikenard." He even issues a command or direction: "Give gifts and offerings to the gazelles; and clothing and dresses to beautiful women! Truly a nose ring softens their malice, as arm bracelets will obtain her love." He then describes the positive benefits of this type of offering: "Thus the beauty will desire her lover and will kiss him; she will satisfy him as he desires. She will not brew mischief, as before, but will cook pottage, to satiate his desire." This is a surprising shift in theme. Up until this point, the poet has been unwavering in his condemnations of and warnings against the dangers of love. The reader may have been encouraged to avoid love completely, but here Tsarfati shifts direction and encourages a certain relationship with love based on monetary bribes rather than on any type of relationship based on attributes or communication: "Songs to seduce maidens are in vain, vacuous speeches as the boastings of mothers about their children." Again this theme does not seem to match the storyline of *Celestina.* In *Celestina*, Melibea seems to suddenly shift her focus when presented with Celestina's thread, however this could hardly be seen as a true monetary gift or bribe. The servants and Celestina herself are certainly motivated by monetary gifts. However, these gifts do not necessarily protect Calisto in the end, but are the only desire of those that seek to profit from his love to his detriment. The shift in focus is

surprising enough that Dwayne Carpenter is only able to explain it as "scarcely concealed irony."[388] While it may be true that Tsarfati is speaking ironically, his ten-line shift and direct encouragement to his audience to gain love's favor through payment does not find a match in *Celestina* or in the tenor of the rest of the poem, and will require further explanation below.

In lines 38-50, Tsarfati suddenly returns to his former encouragements, explaining that his audience should have nothing to do with women and love. In line 45 is found the only overt reference in the entire poem to the subject of Tsarfati's translation, *Celestina*, when Tsarfati gives the name of Melibea and states that she will be "for a sign" (Heb. *lenes*) to all lovers and friends. In these lines the poem becomes more and more focused on Tsarfati's audience, with Tsarfati speaking directly to them in multiple lines. He states: "O chaste ones! How good and excellent it is to turn away from her and to move aside (38)... Flee from their beauty; behold their defects (42)… Despise the sight of them (43)… Turn… flee…. (46) Extinguish… destroy (47)." In the last phrase of this section, Tsarfati again addresses his audience with a question: "Is it seemly for you, my friends and princes, to be shamed in the nets of gazelles[389] bundled together?" These lines begin to shift the focus of the audience toward the poet, pulling them out of the story he had been telling to focus on their relationship with him as the story-teller and poem-weaver.

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[388] Carpenter, "The Sacred in the Profane: Jewish Scriptures and the First Comedy in Hebrew," 231.

[389] Although the word *ya'alot* (Eng. "gazelles") could have been translated as "maidens", or as "graceful ones", it has purposefully been left with its simplest meaning in order to connect Tsarfati's poem with its Andalusian context. The gazelle was one of the most prevalent symbols of the woman as a graceful object of desire and affection.

They also begin to employ more regular and overt Jewish symbols and references. Tsarfati makes references at the beginning of the section to David and Solomon, figures with which every Jewish reader would have been easily familiar. Tsarfati perhaps also makes reference to another famous figure, the "angel of death" from the first Passover in Egypt, although the use of the plural is not common in that context. He speaks of devils and she-demons, figures which had a very prevalent place in Jewish medieval thought, as has been seen in the section discussing Max Brod's Reubeni. He uses a Hebrew word replete with Jewish connections when he calls seductive women "*keley nidah*" (Eng. "menstrous vessels" or "impure vessels"), eliciting a host of connotations and connections to the law of Moses, particularly the attitude of separation that was required by the Jews. In line 46 he refers explicitly to the needs of "my people," emphasizing that these warnings are specifically for the Jews. In line 49 he calls his audience a "gathering and assembly of survivors," again referring directly to the Jews. In line 48, he asks for his audience's attention, and their trust, and states: "Turn to me, and pay attention to my words." When compared with the first line – "Turn, lovers, to the war of lovers" – the shift in focus can be seen clearly.

In the conclusion of the poem, lines 51-62, Tsarfati gives his credentials and offers the reasons why the Jewish people should trust him as a guide. As he states it: "I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince of the faithful, pillar of the faith; a source of wisdom and a wellspring of all intrigues, the support of the stakes of Jacob's tent. His name is Tsarfati; is it not he who has served great rulers and princes, such as Pope Julius,

high priest of the nations…?" In these lines, Tsarfati self-description may remind the reader of the famous Andalusian poet and leader, Samuel Hanagid (Eng. "the Prince"), who was the prototype of the Jew who could engage successfully in the world of the Gentiles – serving as a *vizier* and army general in Muslim Spain – while also leading his Jewish people faithfully.[390] In his introductory poem to the *Biblia Rabbinica*, Tsarfati connected himself with a similar figure – Joseph of Egypt – who was able to interact successfully with a non-Israelite group and still maintain his own Israelite identity. Hanagid's unique position allowed him to serve as a protection for his people and to further their cause. Tsarfati perhaps is strengthening that tie when he calls himself a prince, and when he focuses on his father's name, Rabbi Samuel, since his father was certainly well-known enough and powerful enough to be mentioned in his own right. In any case, Tsarfati sees himself as one who has gained success in Christian society so that he can help his co-religionists, and as one who is qualified to act as a spokesman for the Jews. He is truly the quintessential "go-between," viewing himself as that type of mediator.

Tsarfati concludes his poem with another encouragement for his people to pay attention to it, and then with a warning for all those who reject the poem: "The group of mockers that strive against me, will they not be measured according to their own measurement? Not in vain will Hell burn in them, those who there are given to the future judgments." While condemnations of a poet's detractors were frequent in poetry from

[390] Eliyahu Ashtor, *The Jews of Moslem Spain*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1973), 41-55.

this time, including poetry from Tsarfati himself, these lines have a religious focus and consequence that seems stronger than necessary or than was typical during the time, especially when Tsarfati does not know the source or identity of his supposed detractors. It is clear that Tsarfati is preparing his audience for those who will not understand or appreciate his message, and is indicating that there are dire consequences in store for them. In line 59, he makes a plea directly to his audience – showing just how aware of them he was – asking them to judge him favorably. Unlike Tsarfati, Rojas did not threaten his detractors with religious consequences. However, he did pointedly prepare his audience for those who would not understand the thrust of his work, calling the audience's attention to the impossibility of pleasing them in his prologue.

In the last line of his poem, Tsarfati places four commands upon his audience in quick succession – "Make haste!", "Awake!", "Turn aside", and "Turn!" He seems intent on retaining the attention of his audience, and of helping them to turn aside from disastrous consequences. The focus of all these commands is found in the last hemistich of the poem, in which he calls the attention of all lovers to the "war of lovers." This message, as has been mentioned, is a repetition of the first hemistich of the poem, and calls the audience's attention back to that line, indicating that the entire poem is about the message of war and conflict, and that the listeners should not be lulled into a false security or allow themselves to believe that there is not a battle at hand.

INCONSISTENCIES IN GENERAL EXPLANATION AND ALTERNATE INTERPRETATION

Of the five scholars who have written about this poem, only one – Michelle Hamilton[391] -- has noted that the poem is not internally consistent as a prelude to *Celestina*. The other four scholars – Moshe Cassuto,[392] D. W. McPheeters,[393] Dan Almagor,[394] and Dwayne Carpenter[395] – have been content to point out many of the religious allusions contained within the poem. Cassuto's article mostly contains a catalogue list of many, but not all, of the poem's biblical allusions and references to deviations from the original manuscript. Carpenter claims that these religious allusions, many of which will be analyzed below, indicate a pointed didactic purpose in the poem, that of warning about the moral dilemmas of illicit relationships with women. Almagor focuses on the background of *Celestina* and the uniqueness of Tsarfati's translation as the first Hebrew play and comedy. McPheeters went somewhat further, pointing out that Tsarfati's unique dating of the poem as year 438 was an alternative Jewish method of dating based on the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. He surmised that this indicated a penchant in Tsarfati to dwell on the destruction of the Jewish people. I agree with McPheeters's analysis, and will offer further textual evidence below that a focus on the historical problems of the Jews is a central – rather than a peripheral – theme in Tsarfati's poem.

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391 Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's "Tratado de Melibea y Calisto": A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the Celestina in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," 329-47.
392 Cassuto, "mishirey yosef ben shemuel tsarfati: hakomedyah harishonah be'ivrit," 121-28.
393 McPheeters, "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI," 399-411.
394 Almagor, "hagirsah ha'ivrit harishonah shel *lah selestinah*," 19-28.
395 Carpenter, "The Sacred in the Profane: Jewish Scriptures and the First Comedy in Hebrew," 229-36; ———, "A *Converso* Best-Seller: *Celestina* and her Foreign Offspring," 267-81.

As stated, Hamilton has provided the closest literary analysis of the poem, providing the following description of its inconsistent message:

> Of the 62 lines of Tsarfati's poem, only about 10 contain explicit references to the plot and characters of the *La Celestina*. The other 50 or so lines – roughly 85% of the poem – treat in a very general way some of the themes found in *La Celestina*, such as the pangs of love, the suffering of lovers and the deception of speech. Yet Tsarfati also introduces a series of motifs that seem somewhat alien to *La Celestina*. These motifs and themes do correspond, however, to those of two earlier medieval Judeo-Spanish works whose central character is an evil, old go-between: Judah Ibn Shabbatay's "Offering of Yehuda" (1208) and Judah al-Harizi's "*Maqama* of Marriage," the latter being one of fifty tales collected in the work entitled *Tahkemoni* (1216).[396]

In her article, Hamilton proceeds to show the connections between Tsarfati's poem and these Jewish works, indicating that Tsarfati interpreted *Celestina* in light of the already well-established Jewish tradition of the procuress or go-between.

Hamilton's analysis is useful and accurate, but does not necessarily emphasize what the ultimate message of Tsarfati's poem was, if not simply a direct preparation for his translation of *Celestina*. Hamilton states that the poem used the medieval themes of these two important Jewish works, but does not clearly show how this applied to Tsarfati's understanding of *Celestina* or his interest in that work.

However, when this poem is connected with Tsarfati's other poetry, in particular with his poem condemning the Christian society of Italy, a deeper meaning of the poem becomes clear, and internal inconsistencies in the poem are resolved. The hints and allusions in this poem point clearly to a subtler message hidden within the connections to

[396] Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's "Tratado de Melibea y Calisto": A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the Celestina in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," 334.

Celestina and indicate how Tsarfati read that work, and at least some of the reasons why he was interested in it. While Tsarfati was free to speak openly about the dangers of Christian society in the poem previously analyzed, secure in the knowledge that the poem was written in Hebrew and would never be published to the world at large, he was not free to speak so openly in this poem. Although no evidence currently exists that Tsarfati was able to publish his translation, this type of translation would have been intended for publication. As stated above, Tsarfati would not have translated *Celestina* for a small, limited audience, but would instead have desired a wide circulation throughout the Hebrew-reading world, much as the Spanish and Italian versions of *Celestina* had been printed and gained a wide circulation. With the publication of this work, Tsarfati would be at risk. If indeed he saw in *Celestina* a message of caution against the Christian hierarchy, how might he escape the gaze of that hierarchy and publish this message to all of his Jewish audience? He needed to not only encode his message in the challenging language of Hebrew, but also to use hints and allusions that would indicate to his Jewish audience how they should read his poem, and how they should read the text of *Celestina.* A description of these hints, inconsistencies, and allusions follows below.

The first clue to the audience that Tsarfati is providing a message within a message is the realization that his words do not perfectly describe *Celestina*, but rather seem to refer more to Rojas's prologue that teaches that the world is centered on conflict, and to Pleberio's final lament that love is the ultimate deceiver. Throughout the majority of the poem, Tsarfati focuses on the deceitful, honeyed words of maidens, who are not to

be trusted. However, in *Celestina* it is not the maiden who plots against the suitor, but the suitor – Calisto – who plots against the maiden – Melibea. Although it is certainly the image and love of Melibea that allures Calisto in the first place, Melibea is not portrayed as the main protagonist in the battle of hearts. There are other cunning figures, servants and of course the old crone, that Tsarfati mentions in his poem that do clearly refer to the plot of *Celestina*. However, Tsarfati seems more intent on pointing consistently to the dangers of love and of women than on summarizing the plot.

Another theme that deviates from Tsarfati's typical focus in his poetry, and which may provide another clue to his true intent, are the strong, overt warnings against women in the poem. Over and over again in this poem Tsarfati points to the woman as the destroyer, as the evil to be avoided, and as the source of sorrow and misery. While these types of warnings are typical of his time, this theme is not overtly repeated in his other poetry – although the first love poem analyzed above does reveal a biblical allusion that may serve to warn against love – nor is it strongly evident in Rojas's *Celestina*, if at all. Instead the longing for the woman is portrayed by Tsarfati as a sweet agony, whereas the power ascribed to women in his poem introducing *Celestina* is to that of "angels of death" who are willing to purposefully rather than innocently place their lover's "feet in a trap." In none of his other poems does Tsarfati warn his readers to avoid the love of women, but rather encourages that painful romance as one of the joys of life. Yet in this poem, Tsarfati reverses course in a way that cannot be attributed simply to his purpose of describing *Celestina*, since this view of women is not contained in that work. Again, the

poem points more to Rojas's poetic prologue, in which he states that his work is designed to inure lovers against the dangers of love, although he does not state that the work is specifically to warn men against dangerous women.

Other hints exist indicating that Tsarfati was trying to call his readers' attention to an alternate message. He constantly urges his readers to "pay attention", "be alert", and "awake" to the message of his poem. On multiple occasions he uses languages that the Jewish people would have understood as specifically applying to them in their difficult social situation, although in the poem Tsarfati is overtly only speaking of men being destroyed by love. For example, in line 12 he speaks of the "tearful weeping, the lament of their imploring; saturated with wrath among a despised, wandering people." On first glance this reference seems to be innocently speaking of men wandering aimlessly, lost in love. On closer view, however, the careful reader must ask, who is this despised, wandering people, saturated with wrath? This phrase clearly points to the situation of the Jewish people, particularly in light of the recent expulsion from Spain, but in a broader sense in light of all of Jewish history since the time of the exodus from Egypt. Not only is this reference descriptive of the Jews expelled from Spain, but it is also a biblical allusion referring to the Jews' status as a persecuted people. Psalm 22:7-8 a theme similar to that in this line, stating: "But I am a worm, and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me, mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads."

Once this hint becomes clear, other references to the plight of the lost lovers begin to sound more and more like the situation of the Jews in Christian Europe, plagued by the

insistent and punishing gaze of the Inquisition. Line 16 could describe the destitute Jews dismissed from Spain – "Destitute and barefoot they go by the thousands; scattered on every corner they wander to and fro." This phrase accurately describes the specific situation of the Sephardic Jews who had remained faithful and made their way to Italy. Immediately after employing this description, Tsarfati states that he will be the one to tell their story, "I will tell their tales, their vagabond ways, and their travails as they suffer a heavy load, like that of thousands of mules, when they stumble, wither, and perish with burdens heavier than they themselves." These lines could refer to the burdens of lovers, but can a large number of lonely, rejected men ever appropriately be called a community? Thus the reader should ask who this community of lovers might be that Tsarfati has chosen to represent in his tale-telling, if it is not an allusion to his own Jewish community.

Later, in line 46, Tsarfati again refers directly to the Jewish people, stating that he gives these warnings "So that my people will turn from the path of desire; flee from its burning fire." The fact that Tsarfati here speaks overtly of the Jewish people emphasizes that the message to avoid lust or desire is particularly important for them, and that this message is offered not to protect a general audience, but to guide a specifically Jewish audience. The act of referring to his people at the same time indicates an awareness of their solidarity in the midst of another culture, the dominant culture of the Christians.

Other scholars have noted the importance of this line. Although his translation is too liberal, Carpenter hit at the substance of line 46 when he translated it: "Veer from the

path of Gentile lust; above all, flee its fiery end."[397] A more conservative translation better shows how careful Tsarfati was to mask his true intent by using coded language that the Jewish audience would have readily understood, but that would not have been caught by a non-Jewish audience. The second half of this line indicates from what the Jewish reader needs to run: "flee from its burning fire." Written at a time when the fires at the stakes of the Inquisition were at their height, and written in Hebrew specifically to a Jewish audience, this reference to flight from fire would likely have hit a responsive chord within that audience and would again have called their attention to a deeper message. Indeed, in the line immediately preceding this one, Tsarfati had indicated that he would hold up Melibea and the love of Melibea "as a sign," indicating that the figure of Melibea points to something else, or stands as a symbol for something else. Under this interpretation Melibea would become a sign of the dominant culture, and the love of Melibea would represent the Jews' "adulterous" yearnings after the benefits promised by the apostate religion of Christianity.

Hamilton also paid attention to this surprising line, following Carpenter's translation referring to Gentile lust, and saw it as an allusion to the theme of Gentile lust

[397] Carpenter, "A *Converso* Best-Seller: *Celestina* and her Foreign Offspring," 278. Carpenter's translation depends on how the manuscript is interpreted. The copier for the manuscript often removed the final *mem* of plural words ending in *–im.* Here this would mean that the word I have translated as "my people," (Heb. *le'umi*) could be understood "nations" (Heb. *le'umim*) and that the translation "Gentile lust" (Heb. *hesheq le'umim*) would be correct. Although the mark that the copier typically placed in the manuscript when removing a *mem* is not visible in this phrase, there may be other locations where a *mem* was removed without the designating mark. Whether or not Carpenter's translation is accepted or not, it appears to me that Tsarfati's intent was to warn of this type of attraction, as I explain in this section.

that already existed elsewhere in medieval Jewish literature.[398] However she failed to see in this theme a message that runs throughout the entire poem, and that points to Tsarfati's reading of Pleberio's lament about love. Tsarfati's diatribe against love and desire does not only connect it with Pleberio's diatribe, but also with generations of Jewish literature. Proverbs 5:3-5, although placing the immoral woman, rather than love, as the antagonist, sounds very similar to Tsarfati's description: "For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave." Proverbs 5:22 is directly alluded to by line 21 of Tsarfati's poem: "who, in order to test him, place his feet in a trap." The corresponding verse in Proverbs is translated as "the evil deeds of the wicked ensnare them." The rest of this chapter in Proverbs is devoted to the dangers of women, although it deviates for a few verses in order to praise the virtue of the legal wife of the man's youth (much as Tsarfati deviates for one brief line to praise the Jews as the "chaste ones".) The next chapter in Proverbs – chapter 6 – also discusses the dangers of the woman, but in this case focuses more on her looks than on the words of entrapment that she can produce.

Tsarfati's poem is replete with biblical allusions that warn of the dangers of being drawn away to serve other gods. When connected with Tsarfati's condemnation of Christian culture in another poem – "Loathe the people of anger and decadence… ere in their sin you are destroyed" – this condemnation of love clearly refers to the

[398] Hamilton, "Joseph ben Samuel Sarfati's "Tratado de Melibea y Calisto": A Sephardic Jew's Reading of the Celestina in Light of the Medieval Judeo-Spanish Go-Between Tradition," 345.

condemnation of lusting after other gods and following after them. Another example of biblical allusion is found in line 6, in which Tsarfati describes the tools of the wicked servants as "weapons of violence." This description connects the poem with Genesis 49:5, in which Jacob states that: "Simeon and Levi are brothers – their weapons are weapons of violence." This story, of course, refers to a time in which Dinah, a daughter of the covenant was raped by someone who was not of the same religious background as the Israelites. The story, which in part demonstrated the danger of mixing with Gentiles, ended with the death of many at the hands of Simeon and Levi. Although in this biblical allusion the weapons of violence are found in the hands of the Israelites, rather than in the hands of those battling against them, the story still would have pointed the Jewish audience to a case showing how problematic is was for the Jews to mingle with non-Jews.

Line 13 provides another important biblical allusion, uses similar language to describe the "wounded" lover as Ezekiel 26:16 does to describe the land of Tyre, which is threatened with possible destruction because of following after strange gods rather than hearkening to the voice of the true God. In line 15, Tsarfati states that "the fullness of all the wisdom of the people… is robbed by the hand of a woman, without shame." This is an allusion to the biblical story in Judges 5:27, in which again the interaction between an Israelite and a non-Israelite – in this case Deborah and Sisera – resulted in death, and in which the woman was the killer, smiting Sisera through his temple with a tent peg because he allowed himself to trust her, and went to sleep in her presence. Tsarfati

appears to be warning the Jews to not fall mentally asleep while they are surrounded by the enemy, and even pointedly calls to them at the end of the poem to "Awake!"

When Tsarfati speaks in line 28 of love "as absent of rain, although the sky is full of wind and clouds", he is providing an allusion to Proverbs 25:14, which states: "Like clouds and winds without rain is one who boasts of gifts never given." The allusion refers to those who promise to give good things, and by all outward appearances are able to give good things, but who never live up to their promises. This reference bears strong resemblance to Pleberio's lament, in which he accuses love of being like an enticing meadow that offers nothing to the one who visits, notwithstanding its beauty and its enticing aura of peacefulness. If Tsarfati is referring to the promises made by the Christian hierarchy for those Jews who convert, then he is stating that these promises are made to appear attractive, ready to spring forth upon the heads of those who obey, but that they are never fulfilled.

Probably the strongest allusion to the theme of love as a warning against following after other gods can be found in lines 39-40, in which Tsarfati refers to Solomon, David, and demons. Solomon and David were kings of great power and promise who nevertheless submitted to marriage covenants with foreign women. In turn these women led them to sin and, particularly in the case of Solomon, to worship other gods. With both of these kings, the decision to marry outside of the covenant appears to have been the negative hinge upon which their promising lives turned for the worse. The next line refers to the "angels of death", which would have reminded the Jewish audience

of the great story of exodus, in which the Israelites sought to flee from the presence of the wicked in Egypt. If they had not sought to flee from the land of worldliness, but had instead attempted to stay in Egypt, then they would have been subject to the angel of death just like the Egyptians. The reference to demons connected to medieval Jewish superstitious thought, in which many or most maintained intricate amulets, charms, spells, and protections against demons who could destroy, as in Brod's novel about Hareuveni.

The unclean nature of the "lovers" is emphasized in line 42, in another phrase that has ties to biblical themes of ritual purity. In biblical times, women were considered unclean during their monthly cycle. There was a clear distinction made between the unclean and those who were ritually pure, and this distinction placed a social barrier between them and society. In line 42, Tsarfati uses these phrases to describe the "lovers," stating: "Flee from their beauty; behold their defects. For they are menstruous vessels robed in glorious attire." Tsarfati is teaching that although the lovers (or the Christian society they represent) appear clean and glorious on the outside, association with them will produce the same kind of impurities in the Jewish people that the Christians have. The Jews must stay separate from them. According to the anti-Christian poem analyzed earlier, they should flee from their presence.

After directly warning his people to turn from desire in line 46, Tsarfati again requests that his Hebrew-reading audience pay attention "to my words" in line 48. Then in line 49, he asks a pointed question about the lovers he has been describing: "Is it

seemly for you, my friends and princes, to be shamed in the nets of gazelles?" Tsarfati is indicating that his Jewish audience is the group that has power and royal authority and that they should be the hunter, the one spreading nets for the prey. Instead they are shamefully caught in the nets of the animal. Biblical references to Gentile kingdoms regularly refer to them as various types of beast. Additionally, Tsarfati's reference to shame alludes to Judah's statement about being tricked by his daughter-in-law Tamar in Genesis 38:23, although he should have been the one in the position of power and she should have been the powerless outsider. Tamar, who was acting as a prostitute, drew Judah into a trap by seducing him into an unsavory alliance with her, thereby gaining power over him and gifts from him. This story mirrors how power and gifts are gained by the "other" in *Celestina*. For Tsarfati, the allusion to Judah is an appropriate choice because Judah represents the Jewish people as the first of their tribe. The Jews come from a line of kings, and it is not seemly for them to become powerless in the traps of lesser enemies. Tsarfati knows how attractive the gazelle can be, how seductive Tamar was to Judah, and how beautifully alluring are the promises of social, religious, and economic acceptance that the Christians offer to the Jews. However, in the end he states that this type of relationship would be as shameful as letting the gazelle catch the hunter.

TSARFATI AS GO-BETWEEN

In this analysis of biblical allusions that connect the image of the lover with following after apostate religions, I have thus far skipped over the inconsistency mentioned above in lines 29-38. In these lines Tsarfati rapidly changes direction and,

instead of teaching his audience that they should shun any contact with alluring women, he teaches them how to gain favor with this group. Tsarfati at this point states that: "Silver will gather the hearts of gazelles… Gold will lift up the lover in glory. It [gold] rules as a prince, elevating men, and bringing much joy to the elderly and to children. Great gifts will soften the heart of armies as necklaces will placate great wrath." As has been noted, this shift in focus is either ignored by all other scholars, or, as in the case of Carpenter, it is described as "scarcely concealed irony." However, if this is simply irony, then it is an attempt at irony that fills ten of the sixty-two lines of Tsarfati's poem.

Tsarfati again provides clues to another interpretation for his words. He begins by stating that silver and gold will help the lover to obtain what he wants from the beloved. However, in the next lines, the focus shifts to an avoidance of persecution: "It [gold] will convert every thorn into spikenard." Tsarfati continues in line 32, stating that gold is the one that has power to elevate men, but rather than staying with the theme of the lover, he instead states that gold will help the elderly and the children. The welfare of children and elderly – members of the Jewish community – has not been even briefly mentioned in the poem prior to this point. An alternate interpretation of this line is that gold can influence all segments of society, including the young and elderly. This interpretation still supports the point to be made below about the power of gold.

Tsarfati appears to be saying that it is not the lover that has the power to exalt and that should be trusted, but that gold is that which can be trusted and that which has the real power, at least when dealing with an untrustworthy lover. The next phrase continues

to alter the apparent message, stating that, "Great gifts will soften the heart of armies." What are these armies to which Tsarfati refers? While they could symbolically refer to the scheming servants, old women, and maidens whose weapons are "weapons of violence," at no previous point in the poem have these enemies been described as united as an army against the lover. This mention of armies connects the object of love with those who hold weapons of power on behalf of the state. In Italy, this would refer to the political kingdoms that were developing, as well as to the power of the papacy in Rome, that also controlled its own armies. Only if the Jewish audience has gold and gifts – in other words only as the Jewish community is economically useful to the Christian hierarchy – will the beauty "desire her lover and will kiss him."

Tsarfati provides a biblical allusion in this section to the pottage that Esau ate. He is overtly stating that gold will give him according to his desires, and that after presenting gifts, the lover "will not brew mischief, as before, but will cook pottage, to satiate his desire." To the non-Hebrew audience this cooked food would appear to be a desired blessing, but to Tsarfati's Jewish audience it would constitute an implied warning. In the biblical story, it was Jacob's brother Esau who was tempted by the pottage into giving up his birthright. This trade caused Esau to lose his unique inheritance. If Christians were to cook pottage to satiate the Jews – or if the beloved were to do the same thing – this would be a meal that could not be trusted by the Jews, lest it lead them to a loss of their unique identity as God's covenant people. As would be expected if Tsarfati is indeed speaking in covert discourse, in the very next line Tsarfati again reverses course, calling his Jewish

audience "O chaste ones," and encouraging them again to turn aside from the allurements of the dominant society.

This section in which Tsarfati gives advice on how to gain the cooperation and pleasure of the dominant Christian society corresponds well with his own role as go-between, in a sense brokering the relationship between the Jews and the Christians. Tsarfati himself had stood to offer gifts when Julius was given the office of pope, had given a well-received speech, and in turn was granted special privileges as a Jew and obtained the continued protection of the Jewish people.[399] Although the detail is not included in the historical account, it would even be safe to assume that Tsarfati was offered the "royal kiss" of acceptance by the pope. Tsarfati was instructing the Jews on how to communicate with Christians – through gifts and gold – in the only language that would be understood by them. He had witnessed himself that the only proper way to obtain the favor of the dominant culture was to be of benefit to them.

In this role, Tsarfati cast himself as the leader of the Jewish people, able to communicate with both societies, and promising as a doctor to physically save members of the Christian society, but communicating most openly and freely with the Jewish community. After returning to his diatribe against the lover in lines 39-49, he concludes his poem in lines 50-62 by entrenching his position as the Jewish community's leader and the proper go-between to represent them before the Christians. This is a position of power and importance that would allow Tsarfati to be respected and benefitted by both societies.

[399] Cassuto, *hayehudim befirentze bitequfat hareneysans*, 343.

There is no hint of insincerity on the side of Tsarfati to his Jewish community, but certainly the role that he chooses for himself was one that would benefit him the most.

At the beginning of this section, Tsarfati states that he is to be trusted by his people as a religious leader, but also uses language that identifies him as one who has power with the Christian society: "I am Joseph, son of Rabbi Samuel, prince of the faithful, pillar of the faith; a source of wisdom and a wellspring of all intrigues, the support of the stakes of Jacob's tent. His name is Tsarfati; is it not he who has served great rulers and princes, such as Pope Julius, high priest of the nations, who has brought low the wisdom of the prideful and the wicked?" Tsarfati's connection with Samuel the Nagid and with his father have already been discussed above. However, in this statement, he also describes himself as a pillar of the faith, connecting his role to the Lord, or the Messiah, in Psalm 148:6. On the other hand, Tsarfati is also one who has been connected to leaders such as Pope Julius, "high priest of the nations." Tsarfati's identification of Julius as the "high priest of the nations" should most likely be considered another ploy to cover his true intent. Although it appears to offer great respect and even religious devotion to the pope, Tsarfati's intended audience was the Jewish people, who knew that the office of the high priest had ceased to exist with the destruction of the temple, and that anyone claiming to reign as high priest at that point in time would be a false, apostate religious leader. When Tsarfati states that he "has brought low the wisdom of the prideful and the wicked," the context of the poem makes it impossible to tell whether he is referring to the leadership of Julius, of whether he is stating that he himself has obtained

power with the wicked Christian leaders. It is interesting to note that in line 52 Tsarfati gives his audience another clue regarding how they should read this poem when he states that he is a wellspring of all intrigues.

In lines 55-56, Tsarfati returns to his role as verbal go-between, emphasizing that he is the one who can translate, and that he does so to "sweeten the poor and impoverished, and the heart of a burdened people." He is again speaking directly to the needs of the Jewish community. So that they will understand him, he again states that his only concern is this role of translator. He "arranges" his conversation – with the Jews and with the Christians? – for the benefit of his "brethren the Jews." He encourages others not to fight against him in his role, and then reminds the Jewish people that it is loyalty to God that will bless the Jewish people, because God is the one who is able to truly grant good gifts, that do not need to be purchased with gold: "Your glory will soon shine over you, and God will grant you good gifts." These words allude to Leah's statement in Genesis 30:20 when she gave birth to Israel's first sons, rather than Rachel. Although it appeared for a time that Leah was not in the favored position with God and with Jacob, it was she who was the most blessed by God in the end. God gave her the increase that she desired. In the same way, although the Jewish people appeared to be in a position of disfavor, the day would come when the situation would be reversed, and Israel would take its rightful position as the Lord's "first wife."

Lines 57-58 show again that Tsarfati is very aware of his audience. He indicates that there are members of the Jewish community who oppose him, mocking his efforts.

Although Tsarfati's combative nature has been seen in some of his other poems, his warning of the fires of Hell burning in these enemies would seem very strong if the reader didn't understand the high stakes of the message that he is giving. His true warning has deep spiritual significance in trying to save his people from apostasy, and, for Tsarfati, drastic consequences are appropriate for those who might cause his message to be mocked or ignored. He encourages the audience to hear the message that he is providing, a message of real importance to them.

In line 61, Tsarfati makes one more pointed reference to the situation of the Jews in Spain and Italy, reminding them that "you live in the midst of the conflagration of armies and calamities." The image of burning fires would again point the Jewish mind at that time to the fires of the Inquisition. With that reminder, Tsarfati encouraged his Jewish audience to "All as one make haste! Awake and turn aside! Turn, lovers, to the war of lovers." This poem is not a warning to individual lovers. Tsarfati is speaking to a community, and urges that community to act as one and with urgency. The Jewish community, according to Tsarfati, needs to awake rapidly in order to turn aside from the influence, allure, and promises that the Christian community is offering them. They need to pay close attention to the reality that their existence is a war between two sets of religious promises and ideals, and that they are living in the "war of lovers."

As has been noted by McPheeters, although not in the context described above, Tsarfati's final indication in the poem was the date that he placed upon it. Tsarfati has used a secondary style of dating that was connected to the destruction of the Jewish

temple. McPheeters saw this as evidence of Tsarfati's personal anguish over the plight of the Jews,[400] and other works from Tsarfati show that he was correct. However, it also would have served as a deeply coded signal to the Jews regarding how the poem should be read and interpreted. The poem should be interpreted in light of the destruction that the Jews received at the hand of the Gentile nation of Rome. On the one hand the Jews had relied too greatly upon the promises of Rome, and had forgotten that they were in danger of destruction at all times. On the other hand, they had ceased placating the Romans and had blatantly risen up against them. Tsarfati's community of Jews lived in the ancient city that had caused the temple's destruction, in the shadow of the false high priest of Christianity. He encouraged his people to be very careful in their interactions with that society, recognizing it for what it was. The Jews were encouraged to not trust the promises of the Christians at any point, and to be aware that the Christians sought the downfall and continued misery of the Jewish people. On the other hand, it was necessary and worthwhile to placate that dangerous society by "giving gifts," learning a lesson from the Jews' ancient history with Rome. Tsarfati had learned how to communicate in the interstices of these two communities and offered his advice from the lessons he had learned in doing so.

[400] McPheeters, "Una traducción hebrea de *La Celestina* en el siglo XVI," 401.

Conclusion

This study began by analyzing Fernando de Rojas's historical background in order to show the historical context that spurred and informed his work *Celestina*. By understanding something of Rojas's *converso* and literary background, it was possible to see that Rojas was motivated by many of the ideals of the Renaissance, although communicating in the still-accepted forms of medieval times. Rojas's background also shows evidence that he was deeply affected by his *converso* status.

The themes of conflict, disillusionment, and the false promises of religion – in particular the false promises of Christianity – were seen through a close reading of *Celestina*. However, it is extremely difficult, as evidenced by so much modern disagreement, for the modern scholar, centuries removed from Rojas's times and concerns, to know exactly how to interpret Rojas's varied discourse. At all times it appears that Rojas engaged in double talk, either seeking to offer a subversive message safely while under the gaze of the dominant society, or simply seeking to please the multiple audiences that would have paid for his product. As for the third position supported by multiple scholars such as Bataillón, who have understood Rojas's purpose as an attempt to openly teach the dangers of romantic and illicit love, I see this as an almost untenable position when taking into account all of the variety and nuances of the work. However, whichever of these possibilities is accurate, or whatever combination of each of them is accurate, it is clear that Rojas was extremely successful in producing a work that spoke to a vast and varied audience. With the interpretation of love as a coded

word for the false promises held out by the Christian religion, apparent discrepancies in Rojas's text begin to become more manageable. While there are certainly other valid interpretations of Rojas's meaning and purpose, the interpretation I provide in this study is a viable one.

The question still remains whether or not Rojas's work should be seen as the work of a *converso* who was deeply conscious of those severed ties, or simply as the work of a talented artisan of his time. Although the correct interpretation of his work as the expression of a *converso* would not necessarily be resolved by how it was received by its Jewish audience, a knowledge of that reception would at least provide clues as to what the Jewish community found attractive about *Celestina.* How would a Jewish audience in Rojas's day have read his work? What attracted the Jewish audience to *Celestina*? Or, better said, what attracted Tsarfati as a Jewish poet, physician, and scholar to take time to translate *Celestina* into Hebrew? What did he see in the work?

With this question in mind, chapters three through five of this study analyzed the life and works of Tsarfati, in order to understand his background and the focus of his works. His life as a representative of the Jewish people who also had influence with Christian society has been seen. His adoption into Hebrew of many of the literary forms of his time indicate that he was not a separatist, but that, like Rojas, Tsarfati's enthusiasm and talents were sparked by the changes of the Renaissance. At the same time, Tsarfati's poems also indicate that he did not trust Christian society and strongly warned his fellow Jews to not trust that society. With this context, and with multiple clues provided in the

text of Tsarfati's introduction to *Celestina*, it is possible to ascertain how Tsarfati, a Jewish reader contemporary with Rojas, read Rojas's work. Like Rojas, Tsarfati lived under the strong gaze of the dominant society and used double meanings in order to communicate his message. He dwelled on the power of language to convince, persuade, and deceive. And he saw in *Celestina* a message warning Jewish society of the false promises of Christianity, the apostate religion which held out love as the universal ideal in order to seduce the Jews, but that did so only to gain power over them – or at least he saw in *Celestina* the opportunity to communicate that message.

In response to the questions offered at the beginning of this study, I propose that Tsarfati was attracted to Rojas's work because he saw in it a beautiful piece of literature that coincided – in the realm of love and the power of language – with his own literary interests, and that communicated the religious skepticism that he wished to portray to his people. Tsarfati, like Rojas, was a go-between for disparate cultures, one of them the sub-culture of the Jews, and the other the dominant culture of Christianity. Both sought to survive and succeed in the light of their connections with those two cultures. *Celestina*, among other things, is the product of that desire. Tsarfati's translation served a similar purpose. Rojas began his work by discussing a world-view centered on conflict, and concluded *Celestina* with a similar theme. Tsarfati stated the same concern in his introductory poem – that the Jewish existence is one full of conflict and that all should constantly be alert to the "war of lovers."

Tsarfati's other poems seems to reveal that he was himself also pulled by the strong allure of the dominant culture. As may often be the case in literature, his strong warnings to others may have reflected internal tensions and conflicts that existed within him. Tsarfati, existing in a liminal state of in betweenness, able to communicate effectively as a go between with both Christian and Jewish cultures, could clearly understand the dangerous pull of the dominant society. This tension – and his battle with it – appears to have defined much of his existence, and is revealed in this analysis of his works.

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